


Archives
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T833Q
v.105
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Archivist

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FRONT COVER ART BY CHRIS PHILLIPS

BACK COVER ART BY DEBORAH FORBES

DEBORAH FORBES

Translation

My wrists are thin
(with veins too close to the surface
to be safe)
but too strong to be broken,
and fingernails stronger
than window glass
than egg shell.
I can even break out
of the delicate symmetry of ribs.

Woman means opening.
In return for blood
even the cool steel fence
could be made to want me.
The soil comes inside and
leaves me stained for weeks.

JOSH MAY

To Pretend to be Sparked by Candles

Thank god I have shaken providence,
allowing me the longer sounds of days,
and borders of trees and casual contact.
No dry wood or conversation can call
up deep flame and dead reports.

I know no such luck shall endure.
Even now I find myself making trips
further than any night need see.
On this reployed light any dawn would die.
Thank god providence has left me.

More wax for my hands alone.



 JEFFREY DOMINA

The King

My father said to me, "There's a reason they call him the King, you know.."

He was talking about the Elvis and pointing to a framed velvet portrait that hangs in our living room. He stood with his legs spread apart and his head bowed. He was trying to look like Elvis.

"Why's that?" I asked.

"Shut up and don't bother me," he said.

"But Dad, I want to know why they call him the King."

He sat down in his worn-out red easy chair and said with disgust, "What do you know about Elvis Presly? The man was a god."

"How so, Dad?"

He sneered and raised his arm as if to backhand my face.

But I stepped away and said, "Dad, come on. Why do they call him the King?"

"You're not old enough," he said, feeling around the TV for the remote under his loose thighs. "where the hell is the clicker?" he asked.

"Dad! I'm old enough to know — I swear I am."

"The hell you are boy. Do you know Buddy Holly? Do you know Chuck Berry? Bill Haley? See? These were great men. You don't know them. You just don't know."

But I do know! I know Bob Dylan. I know Paul Simon and John Lennon. Jerry Garcia."

He looked at me very angry. "What? Who are these?"

He burped and I could smell it.

"Please, Dad, tell me why Elvis is the King. Then I'll leave you alone. I promise."

"Why so interested all of the sudden."

I got down on my knees beside his dusty old chair

"Come on, Dad. Please."

He watched me a moment and smiled.

"All right, boy," he said. "You want to know about the King. What's it worth to you?"

"What's it worth to me?"

"Yeah. Will you bring me a beer?"

"Then will you tell me?"

"Yeah."

"I'll Bring a beer."

He took the Schlitz I brought him and said, "Okay. My cigarettes are in the john."

"But I brought you beer and you said —"

"Do you want to know all or just some?"

"All."

"I want a cigarette."

The cigarettes weren't in the bathroom, but after checking his cot, the hall, and the cinder block steps outside the trailer I found a pack of Kool in the pocket of his jean jacket in the kitchen next to the sink.

When I came back to the living room he had slumped down in the chair, and his pale hairy arms were stretched out over the armrests. He was trying to look dead.

"Dad," I said.

He opened his eyes. They were pink and wet.

"You're a good boy," he said. "I'm proud of you."

You're proud of me?"

"I'm proud of you."

As usual, I just rolled my eyes and walked out of the room without saying another word.

DAN CAMPBELL

darkness

in the dying half of the year
when the sun grows dim
over the treetops
and the snow clouds wreathe
the mountains' heads
obscuring
the ground beneath
where the spirits of life dwell
fostering the summer harvest
waning from full to sickle
the moon grows long
and low
upon the shadow of the fallen snow
crystal cold and clear

diamonds in the sky shine bright
barely scintillating color
in the stark winter air
gliding through the trees
soft and white
with a sharp eye and ear
quick to spot a movement
in the stillness of the snow
drifted up against the trees
whitewash in the night ascending
slow and eternal
into Gwydion's path
strewn with stones
of ancient wisdom across a stream
embraced by darkness running
from east to west returning

underneath the ground
the night folk twist and shape
eons into eternity
from the tree shadows' depths
silently standing between
in the cool-crisp air
and frost-hazed earth afire
with life drawn strenuous
and thin as the last silver wisp
turn to the dark
of the moon invisible as the night
among the trees in the snow
falling through the stars
to the ground
below

JOSH MAY

Dreams of Egypt Intersecting

arthritic springs awake less constantly
now I am forced to relay hunger myself
conscious even of the automatic blinking
that breaks sequence into true sight

all started then I am and she had me
freaked immortal climbing it full
and speaking of her with headspins and
granite avatars as an undefined river

continually wrapped in asp and cloth
our fencing forked tongues are
also an eternal cross clean as the
bones bathed in formaldehyde pools

until everything reflowed a sky said
the prophecies of a retained moon
earth kiss moon but there could never
be anything and so the floods

a king's way to go soaked in thoughts
of unpressable skin trapped under
the well worked stones he gave
serving now as walls for undying air

MICHELLE SHEETS

Sons

Mom and I were in the kitchen, amidst the seed packet flowers and the Victorian lithographs she deftly revised with scissors and glue, discussing the day's currents through clouds of smoke recycled by the ceiling fan. Our chatter floated through the windows into the church parking lot, and I turned to gaze at the festival being assembled by the sun-beaten workers that slept upon trailer floors for a sliver of night. Deep in the fields surrounding the parking lot they were catapulting the carts of the Ferris wheel. One crashed to the ball diamond at the field's far edge, and Mom spoke before I could see any of the laboring souls get deliverance.

"Stephanie, when was the last time you saw Tilly?"

"Before I left for baby-sitting. You know, both that kid and his dog need heavy sedation. The last time I watched a boy, solo, that is, was when I smashed Tilly's nose into the coffee table. Sometimes I'm so afraid..."

"You know that wasn't your fault. Even mothers have accidents."

"Who knows if motherhood lies ahead for me. I scorned all of those frilly baby dolls. I did nothing but decapitate Barbies and reduce them to strip tease artists."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. I haven't seen Tilly since three. I think he's hiding something from us."

"At least he tells us what the dog is thinking. Remember when she was in that contorted position, and he uttered, in that craggy voice, 'That's my poop stance'?"

"Yeah...but Carol told me that the scouts are going past Hogg Creek for shooting practice."

"He wouldn't tell us that, would he? Do you still throw away his squirt guns?"

"Of course, I just won't stand for it."

Night fell as the sweat-stained men spiraled the carousel into the church commons. I planted my butt upon our new cedar porch set, which is certain to be decimated by the antics of Tilly's friends, scanning the parking lot and game lawns infested by bands of baton twirlers. I spotted Tilly snaking his way through the disheveled tent awnings, his nose contorted to accommodate his glasses slipping from nagging sweat as his hands clutched to a white sheet. He tripped over a spike erupting from the pavement.

"Tilly! Where have you been?"

He feigned a smile and beheld a paper stamped with concentric circles and riddled by BB holes.

"Why? You know better!"

"First of all, you're only twelve feet above me, so you don't have to yell."

"You know..."

"Second, my name is Steven. I'm no damn Two Ton Tilly."

"Sorry, the name stuck."

"Lardo De Butta!"

"OK, we're even."

Frustration burnt my tongue as he slipped from my view and ascended the wrought iron steps to our apartment door. Silence again, just as two nights before when I interrupted one of his bedroom soliloquies. Knowing that I had waged a defeated battle against insomnia that night, I trudged through our darkened hall to the refrigerator for a pop and ducked beside his door, absorbing his story. He spoke as if he was perched atop a skyscraper, mourning over the screaming mothers clutching to their injured babies as they raced past the infernos below. He whispered, "if you hear me, woman, you are already dying." A faint voltage swept across my left side as the hair on my neck and limbs arose. When I heard a breathless, "but it was all a dream," I thrust myself into his room.

"Tilly, where did you hear that? Did you make it up yourself?"

He transformed his voice to that of a three-year-old.

"I don't know."

That weekend the annual circus of gluttony, petty gambling and drunken fistfights ensued right in our back yard. As soon as the farce commenced, mom enlisted me for duty at her Zoo Parade booth, three hours of "sorry, but thanks for playing." Still, I peddled the tickets until the sun faded, hoping to see some child's face glow from a winning number.

After I had witnessed two hours of low-slung smiles floating in front of our booth, I started counting the minutes

MICHELLE SHEETS

left. I could almost taste the malignant smoke which would sate my lungs once I returned home. Why did I ever pick up that wretched habit? As I soothed my conscience with a barrage of excuses, Tilly breezed past, his arms flailing like the blades of a push lawn mower.

Another pubescent fellow trailed him, yelling over his shoulder, "Stephanie, your brother is crazy! He should be put in an institution!"

As they faded into the crowd a throng of children engulfed our booth. After a flurry of breath-holding and whining on their part, no stuffed animals left the transplanted cafeteria table, and Mom released me.

I had to penetrate a radius of beer-breathing men and holster-bearing police officers en route to the apartment. A woman, crooned, "Will Michael Bolton please come to the information booth. Michael Bolton!"

I climbed the steps with a phlegm-laden sigh, praying that he hadn't bolted the door. Then he echoed through my memory, "locks don't stop thieves," and I thumbed my lighter as I turned the knob. The dog greeted me with a chorus of hearty barks. I grabbed the cellophane coated pack, hesitated long enough to see "20 Class A Ohio" stamped on the bottom, and ignited one of the beasts.

Tilly hates my smoking. His eyebrows and mouth wrinkled in disgust when I lit up in front of him on the ride home from college. That gesture rivaled that which accompanied my tossing his life-size He-Man off the porch when I was drunk. When I called him from the hospital a few weeks ago, his only retort was, "so being on drugs is like living as a tie-dyed shirt?"

My shirt bore bleeding rays of orange and purple as I puffed away on the living room recliner. Crushing the singed butt in a salsa dish, I listened to the cacophony outside, the strains of rude mating rituals, a has-been band, and an organ grinder. My dog leapt from the couch opposite me and hurled a single bark out the screen door.

Tilly's reddened figure melted past the door way. The frame held nothing but barren hinges. "What's wrong, Tilly?"

"Mommy told me to stay inside. Two gangs from the south side may start a riot."

"You're exaggerating."

"No, the police have already taken away two guns from people. Even an eleven-year old had razor blades in his pocket."

"Well, stay here for a bit. Then again, some of them might try to hide here."

"Yeah, people think this is part of the church all the time."

"At least we *don't* live there. Remember that time somebody broke into the church and shit beside the Baptismal?"

"Oh, what about that guy done up in fatigues that used to shake his fist at the altar every day at noon sharp?"

"Tilly, let's go to the tunnel."

"I think daddy left it unlocked."

We dodged a swarm of used cars walking to the stone patch that harbors the concrete ramp plunging to the tunnel chambers. Years ago the grounds keeper shoveled coal down it to heat the block encompassed by the church. The steep ramp tickled random skate boarders and bikers until a small boy slipped off the top edge and broke his leg. Afterward Dad stretched fencing around its perimeter, and an elder man fastened boards above the deepest part. He painted the wood gray; I didn't bother to ask him why.

Tilly reached for the tarnished handle and stepped down the planks to the first chamber. Above me the ashen boards had been mottled and warped by the neurotic weather, but a few had fled unwillingly. One of the remnant spikes had fallen to the drain grill, and I stumbled over it as I joined Tilly.

Our hands fluctuated in front of our noses to waft away the scent of sewage radiating from the bloated pipes. Around us were piles of decomposing church bulletins and small desks rotted by the seething ceiling. We skipped over the dank puddles to reach the anteroom, and we beheld the twin sterling boilers which wouldn't expel their rage until frost gilded the grass above.

MICHELLE SHEETS

Tilly stopped by the imposing metal desk and office files, his hands gliding over the stray tools and memos. As he entered this trance of scrutiny I retired to the beaten couch that used to reside in our living room. His fingers coaxed open the geriatric locks upon the file cabinets and edged through the documents.

"Look, Steph, these are the blueprints for the rectory."

"I know the floor plans by heart. I worked there for a year and a half, remember?"

"The script here reads 'St. Gerard Redemptorist College'."

"Dummy, so does the engraving above the front door. It was a scheme never realized."

He pushed the drawer back to its past and turned to the leaden box welded to the floor. I scanned the swimsuit calendars chipping apart on the rude nails thrust into the concrete. By the time I reached 1956, he was taunting its rusted lock with a crowbar. I bounded over to him and held the bottom as he pried it open. The heavy lid catapulted off its corrugated hinges, and he scrambled through the billowing dust past the tunnel entrance to retrieve it.

As I reached into the stronghold chilled metal nicked my palms. Embracing a circular base, I lifted the artifact into the fetid basement air. Splintering rays of light danced off the boilers and hardware implements. Tilly approached me, gaping at the divine apparition that whispered through my dripping blood.

A round crystal window pierced its center; layered gold spokes completed its face encrusted with diamonds and emeralds. I elevated it above my eyes to read, "*Parish of St. Gerard Magella, Dublin, 1911*" etched under the base.

"I'm surprised this one didn't sink with the Lusitania."

"I learned about that in history class last year."

"That's your favorite class, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I bet this is the monstrance they used when the church was where the cafeteria is now."

"We should pack it in a velvet box and mail it to the museum downtown."

"That's silly. We couldn't even put a return address on it."

He lowered it back into the box and shrouded it with a tattered sheet from his back pocket.

"Tilly, that's blasphemy. Don't you ever change your shorts?"

"Since when have you worried about blasphemy? The only other thing I have is a ball of snotty Kleenexes."

"OK."

He replaced the lid, and I mounted the cement floor and reached beneath the cabinets to pull forth several soot-covered, framed photos. Tilly grabbed the top one and wiped it with his other pocket's burden. Half of it showed neglected farm land. He nearly abandoned his effort until it revealed a cornerstone inscribed, "St. Gerard Church, 1917". Furiously spreading his mucous over the remainder, he uncovered a crowd of farmers and police officers. At the far left stood a grinning gent embracing a rifle and a pitch fork.

"I want to hang this in my room."

"Mom wouldn't like that. Besides, she's probably returned to the house by now. We'd better head upstairs."

"What about the tunnel?"

"We'll have to save that expedition for another day."

"Steph, please, I've never been all the way through."

"The most exciting thing about it is that it used to be a registered fall-out shelter. Now it's just a haven for spider webs and sewage stalactites."

"I'd rather go to Ohio Caverns."

"Maybe next week. That kid I baby-sit is going on vacation."

As we climbed the ramp I noticed Mom and the dog peering down from the porch like snipers. Mom cast a stealthy glance at us as she dragged on her cigarette. Vice is a thing she flaunts like a stellar lilac bush.

A thunderclap backfired through the sky and the sound system nagged, "The Celina Police have

MICHELLE SHEETS

closed the festival for today. Officer Lynch report to St. Rita's Hospital."

"That's Bill's dad."

"Isn't he the one who picked on you all the time back in first grade?"

"Yeah, but he was held back. He's still on my baseball team and my scout troop. Will you really take me to Chillicothe next weekend?"

"If that junker of a car survives, sure. Let's have some ice cream upstairs."

An hour later I retired to bed, crowned in goose feathers and cloaked in polyester stuffing. In one of my dreams I wandered through a labyrinth immersed in fall-ripened vines. Bounding around corners and retracing feeble steps I searched for a crimson taffeta gown for a gala, anticipating the celebration of Dad's forty-third birthday that would accompany nightfall. Exhaustion teased me, and I grasped several whorls of leaves to ease my descent to the ground. As my breath returned Tilly crawled from an underground portal and offered me a hat box covered in cabbage roses. He pulled back the top and panned his hand across like a street-corner magician. Inside was a smattering of costume jewelry and acid tabs. Glancing at him I noticed that his body had regressed to that of a toddler, his hair brassy ringlets as it had been a decade ago.

"Take one, Steph. I dug them from under my sandbox."

"I can't do that anymore. Just flush them down the toilet."

He grasped my arm and fingered the bruise halos about the needle tracks on my inner elbow.

"Did this happen when you were in the hospital?"

"Yes, Steven."

I crushed some of the leaves to anoint my palms with their liquid flame and grasped his tender arms to see him echo my movements with a yielding glance. I stretched his frame and sculpted it into a mass of sinews, pulling hair to its surface. He turned away, a man, retrieving an emerald gown and a marbled tunic from the other side of the portal.

"Take this. Mom is waiting."

He led me through the maze, and we entered an antiquated courtyard. In the center a heap of firecrackers and Roman candles exploded for Dad's entrance. A jester beckoned to me with his shofar. I strolled over to him, grabbing the mandolin beside his feet. While my fingers drifted over its frets I sang the musings of a harnessed gazelle, a song for Steven.

As my nocturnal stupor faded waves of orange and red crashed upon my inner eyelids. Before that vision could inundate me I cracked open my eyes and brushed away the sleep clinging to my left eye. I reeled my cover to the floor, plodded over to my dresser for a cigarette, and unleashed my stereo to counteract the vaudeville soundtrack emanating through my windows.

Across the room the creaking hinges and knob succumbed to a visitor. Tilly hesitated to inspect the new photos tacked to my door and gagged as he walked through the nicotine haze to greet me.

"Do you know what time it is? I've been waiting so long to tell you..."

"Tell me what?"

"You know Bill Lynch?"

"What about him?"

"He was messing around with one of his dad's guns, trying to look like a real sharpshooter in front of the mirror."

"and,"

"The gun was police issue, nine millimeter bullets..."

"I see."

"Well, his friend caught him, this older kid, and tried to wrestle it away from him."

"Is Bill all right?"

Silence oozed from the specters writhing over the senseless objects about us. I annihilated my cigarette and held him with nothing but my gaze as he walked away.



MICHELLE SHEETS

After the carousel fled on the back of a semi and the last tent anchor ceased its copulation with the pavement, police motorcycles led a cavalcade of purple-flagged cars into the parking lot. The hearse trailed them, and six boys adorned in baseball uniforms rushed up to it as it expelled its burden. From atop our home and the bell tower sparrows whispered a requiem.

The sun scarred a few degrees of the sky before I saw my brother emerge from the church. Shedding his altar vestments to unveil his jersey and stirrup pants, he pivoted himself toward a beckoning car that had already siphoned a pair of his cohorts. He took a few steps toward them but veered over to the stairs. The dog barked once as he crossed the threshold of our apartment. He backed up against the radiator and elevated himself to sit upon it.

"Steven, aren't you going to the burial?"

"Nope. Let's go for a ride."

"We'll have to wait until the cars clear the lot. Do you want to go anywhere special?"

"Where can we buy a velvet box?"

"We'll have to make that one."

"I'll go change my clothes first."

MICHAEL WITTMANN

AN INCOMPLETE
CAUCHY CIRCLE

one would it be alright if I decided to set myself as a constant in an otherwise chaotic "world"?	eight two possibilities: change with the world or change the world More possibilities: assume the static or assume the changing And more: everything stable or nothing stable. And more.	seven More than eight points on a circle but the center exists.	six Changing Growing Evolving Moving Drifting am I.	five would it be alright if I decided to set the world as a constant in the chaos that is "me"?	four The world exists with or without me I am irrelevant The world relevant	three By knowing every point on the circle, the center is known	two I am I who am I am I who I am	$f(z.) = 1/(2\pi i) \int f(z)/(z-z.)dz$ $f(z.) = me$ $f(z) = life$
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CHRISTOPHER PHILLIPS

Strange Air

Essex, Connecticut

The train can still be heard at the wharf,
where boats of all sizes rest, waiting,
lashed to rows of wooden piers.
The sound of creaking here
is not the boards or the boats themselves,
it is the sound of ropes
pulled taut,
the sound of straining to be free
from the still water
that keeps them floating
gently, knocking one another.
I am eight years old here
and stand for perhaps the only time
at what I see as a window on the world,
in a town that is gateway to all others,
by boat, by train,
by steam and compass,
sextant and coal.

The Connecticut Valley Line
of the Valley Railroad Company
runs through Essex and we
bought our tickets from the old
man behind the grilled window
to take a short ride aboard
the towering black steamtrain,
inside on red leather seats
or on an open car behind the engine
where cinders fly.
As the train speeds through
the narrow path of pines,
cinders swirl madly like campfire sparks,
like a teeming swarm of angry insects
that need a few minutes before realizing
that the only way is up.
They feel like peppercorns
as I take them into my lungs.

I have heard that pepper can go undigested
for years, that it collects itself into a ball
in the stomach or in the intestines.
I have thought that I still have cinders in my lungs,
perhaps in a ball, perhaps distributed throughout,
hung in suspension, and when my blood is cleansed
by the oxygen in my lungs
it passes through this cinder filter
so that my dreams have been colored with trains,
with the gritty allure of the abandoned depot
so that wherever I am
I am moving in crazy motions,
and whenever I exhale
I am breathing out strange air.



DEBORAH FORBES

Anniversary

In 1942 the crop refused to ripen.
The family strained against stillbirth,
pulled at weeds until the roots gave,
left open wounds in the soil
and hope of healing.

All night they worked bare handed.
The big dipper hung
closer than it ever had been
and empty.
As the useless leaves slid from their fingers,
each inherited a star—
a cold, untouchable place.

My grandfather knows
the exact group of trees
where the farmhouse walls had been.
They are scarecrows and a skeleton.
(One is missing leaves in August—
ghosts of birds sit in its branches.)
Sick with their height,
I measure the destruction of a home
in rings of bark.
They are illegitimate children.
Their roots drink my history,
the blood in my veins.

But they are a part
of any family I dare claim
and so is the corn.
The half-moon brings shadows
across its silent field
and I hold my breath,
feel the space without
and the cold blank place within.
The soil is hard around the roots—
all my tugging could not crack it.
I wonder if there will be enough
to harvest.

The leaves are waist-high
and so cold
I almost forget they once held warmth.
I offer my hands to the empty dipper
uncovered in the crops.
I take my place among the plants.
Even if this season turns dry
and the corn falls before it forms,
this line will not turn to ghosts.
I am the daughter of broken house
and sister to the soil.
I am proof against barrenness.

-ARCHIVE92

JERRY A. DOWLESS

bugs globed bone

Step Thru.

Build thru bone.

He said, "he's jesus,

"and the pan, its spilt, it ain't,

in the fire-music of jarred grass-

hoppers of me,

"Build thru and "be my bones for me-

"says

"I'm gentle..." a two-lidded pot,

I am old!

"let me sleep!" I am old, the dogs are big

like houses, the horses

are dogs and thunder, houses half my days

an' I am spilt and fallow,

What'll go one porch?

O'er rotten boards, my dead house

he floats,

two feet, four feet over, a grasshopper beatin

, with the pale foot other,

like the sky.

The sky's runnin long

the corn, pull against fish

and echo

 JERRY A. DOWLESS

empties house, all swamy, deep water

he floats

with three feet, and I says "Stay. Rest over

rifles, rest b'low black trees,

sleep,

with the root of my marrow

I know you" " " "

' ' ' 'can't, I see, keep these stars off her,

I

call one Big, he is big hands" " " " "

and, another, a gun it sparks up

trees, ' ' ' ' in winter:

"it'll make trees grow your hands, son."

you'll walk,

a stubborn and a fallow and a stupid

is the lightning in my house,

boy,

" " " " "you have become black, opened and opened and opened,

" " " " "black is a greasy mosquito lover past your teeth,

"black is the trees of your lungs and house

black is the kingdom, ' ' ' ' "

bones are gone"

KATHERINE GUCKENBERGER

The Kiss

"I saw you kiss Bridget behind the refrigerator door, Dad."

David didn't move. He sat straight in his old black leather arm chair and then folded the paper, slowly. But he didn't speak.

"You thought I couldn't see, but I could, Dad, through the crack."

Now David looked toward the door. Closed. Will had closed it behind him. This was a private conversation. Man to man.

"What are you talking about, Willy?" David turned to his son, not yet eleven, not yet five feet tall., but with a serious look on his face. The smoke from David's cigarette blocked a clear view of Will, who looked small and far away in his red soccer t-shirt, impossible somehow, instead of standing in front of him on the Indian weave rug, accusing.

"You kissed Bridget, Dad. I saw it. Why did you do that?" Will asked. The high voice and the strain on his face, now attacking his whole body as he twitched and curled his toes in his dirty tennis shoes and rocked on unsure legs, made his question sound rhetorical. But he needed an answer.

"I don't know what you're talking about, son. I was just trying to help Bridget get dinner for you and the kids before Mom got home. Do you have a problem with that?" David was defensive.

"No." Will's body felt unsupported and droopy, standing there next to his father's chair. "No," he said again.

"Good. Then I'm willing to forget this ridiculous conversation. It never occurred. Now, are you willing to forget this conversation, too? Will?"

But Will had turned away from his father, seeing only the kiss, Bridget's smiling face, and then the tacos on the table and Bridget laughing softly.

David and Evelyn had run an ad in the local paper two years before that read "Au pair needed for three adorable children. Must be well educated, young, fun, and responsible. Contact Dr. Vincent at 267-9225. References required." After four interviews, David chose a quiet British girl, nineteen years old but worldly, Bridget Grady. She'd been the only girl who showed up in a skirt and with a list of questions to ask him. A two-way interview. He was immediately impressed. "Let me call my wife so we can set up a meeting tonight at the house." But he knew she was perfect. The kids would love her, Evelyn would be able to go back to work, and he'd finally have enough time to open his own practice. Everyone in East Hampton liked to have his or her own personal dentist. But what David couldn't see was that the two-way interview was the beginning of an unraveling and that he was solely responsible.

The summer of the kiss was the first time in Will's short life that he experienced an adult feeling of helplessness, that he was somehow out of control. He turned to his dog, Thunder, for comfort, a fat, black scared-of-the-water lab who didn't seem to care if Will wanted to just lie in the backyard grass waiting for someone to yell at him and tell him to come inside or at least to get up and do something useful. Thunder was the only one who understood without having to be told anything, and he'd lie there with Will, just resting, unless Will saw little red ants creeping up on them.

Everyone thought of Will as a recluse, a quiet child who'd rather read a book on whales than sit around the table talking. His teachers always agreed. "Will's a thinker," they'd say, and laugh a bit, as if a thinking boy was an odd thing. But, lying there in the grass, Will needed to think. He needed to examine the long-stemmed weeds with tiny white flowers in front of his face, the sandy dirt he'd smashed his elbows into in order to prop up his head, his sister's over-turned bike with training wheels, the green wooden slats hiding the first floor under the house where his father kept the lawnmower and the boat, his brother's ripped kite from the surf shop, his dog, his mother, his father, and Bridget. If he wasn't a thinker, he thought, he'd never be able to work things out alone, in his head.

From his position in the grass Will could hear the traffic on the highway, distant and swishing sounding, and occasionally the calls of the mockingbird who had moved into the yard in hopes of securing the territory. The bird perched on the tree right outside his parents window, bobbing his head up and down quickly, white stripes on his back shaking, whenever David yelled at him to get lost. Lately the bird, Will called him Spike because of his resilience, had begun to sing in the middle of the night, waking the whole house, the windows open for the breeze. David couldn't stand it.

"Let me kill that damn bird, Evelyn."

"How can you be so heartless, David? Does it really matter?" Evelyn was getting Lucy and Peter ready for camp. Will was eating corn flakes. "Who needs zinc on their nose?"

"It wakes up the whole neighborhood with that singing. It's in our yard. I think it's up to us to do something,

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that's all." David pulled up a chair and sat down next to Will. The kids left for the old school bus, painted red and black for Camp Lady Bug.

The smell of his father's coffee reminded him of Saturday mornings, when they'd all sleep late then make pancakes on the griddle. Will could mix the batter himself, from scratch. Flour, sugar, baking soda in one bowl, eggs, milk and melted butter in the milkshake blender, then everything combined, stirring slowly. But that summer he usually just fixed himself a bowl of cereal with cut up strawberries or bananas. And woke up earlier.

"Morning, Willy. Don't get much sleep these days, huh?"

"Nerves," his mother said. "He's growing up."

"No," his father said impatiently, "It's that damn bird. Wakes us all up, doesn't it, Willy?"

His flakes were soggy, and he'd finished the banana, cut in even thick slices so each was a mouthful, the way he liked it. He looked at his father and out of the side of his eye saw his mother move from the kitchen sink and out the door. It was a deep sink, made of an icy metal. He knew how cold it felt to sit in the sink, even with warm soapy water dripping on his limbs, coming out of a lemon colored sponge. The stopper was orange and rubber and he could kick it aside with one foot. They washed his hair with "No More Tears" so it wouldn't hurt his eyes. Now his shampoo stung.

"Don't call me that," he said to his father.

"What?"

"Willy. Bridget says it's a rude word."

"Well, she's just joking, you know that." His father sipped and swallowed loudly with an early morning sound that bothered Will.

"It's a penis, Dad. In England, 'willy' is a penis. Why would you call me that?" Will stood up and walked to the sink to dump out his leftover cereal. It looked like a brown stopper covering the drain. He kicked the cupboard under the sink, hard, with the top of his foot the way he kicked a half volley in soccer.

"What is your problem?" His father grabbed him by the arm and squeezed. Harder, Will thought. Why doesn't he just squeeze harder? "I asked you a question, Will. Answer me!"

"I asked you a question, Dad, and you never answered me."

"What are you talking about?" David released his grip on the skinny red arm. Will thought of screaming—why'd you do it? Why'd you do it? Why'd you do it? When his father slapped his face, he knew he was screaming.

Will rolled onto his back, the long grasses poking the back of his legs. Thunder ran down the porch steps and jumped on Will, kissing. Kissing was a mystery. Who made it up? He thought of animals, whales rubbing and bumping faces together, and the male sea lion biting the nose of the female. Did that count? The females usually bled, their noses pink and raw under the nettley whiskers. Like the grass under his legs.

Thunder lay down beside him, a lump of fur that moved up and down in the middle, twitching nervously, shaking a leg, exhaling loudly as if forcing the air out of his lungs consciously. Looking toward the sky Will squinted, winking with two eyes at the sun. To the left he saw the tree swing, the ropes that held it up and the wooden seat, painted by Bridget, light blue.

"Egg-shell blue," she said.

"Sky-blue," Will challenged.

"Baby-blue." She smiled.

"Blue like the veins in your wrist!" Will yelled, but she never let him win.

"Blue like the clearest Caribbean water on a beautiful day. That's what the can said, anyway."

"No, it didn't. It said 'faded turquoise.'" Will had helped her pick it out at Grand Hardware.

"Right. Faded turquoise—the color of Caribbean water. Should we paint in some fish? Ever seen a Yellow Tang?"

But they never did. They never found the time to go back to the store, and then they both forgot. Or, at least Bridget forgot. Will had drawn up some plans with his colored pencils usually reserved for maps and nature drawings, but pretended to forget, too, when Bridget lost interest. She moved on to other things. Summer school during the day when the kids were at camp, cooking at night, reading and homework. Boring, Will thought. Bridget was getting boring. She didn't have time for him.

"I'm going to the store, Will, want to come?" His mother was calling him from the porch.

"Where's Dad?"

"He had some work to finish up at the office"

"Where's Bridget?"

"School, rest of the day off. What do you say?" She was coming down the steps, toward him, keys in hand, walking slowly as if she was lonely. He didn't want to go, but he would. For her.



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"O.K.." He stood up, crinkled grass prints on the back of his sweaty legs. Thunder sat up, questioning. "Don't worry. I'll get you a treat."

As his mother backed out of the driveway Will watched the yard, Thunder, and all the things he'd been observing grow smaller and move further away. The car shifted into drive and they passed the yard on the right, the things in it becoming unfamiliar as they shrank. Going around the block they passed the front of the house, plain wood, off-white with green shutters, a front porch, the mailbox painted with left-over faded turquoise paint. A falling down wood and chicken-wire fence at the corner of the lot marked the marshy bog where thunder loved to play. The water was soaked enough into the ground that he wasn't scared. And because he didn't swim, the bog was a great cooling bath.

"Look! There's Spike," Will pointed.

"Who's Spike?" His mother slowed down and peered in the direction of Will's finger.

"The mockingbird Dad wants to get rid of. He's on top of that short tree."

"Unless he finds what he's looking for, I doubt he'll stay much longer." His mother drove on.

"What's he looking for? A mate?"

"You got it. Seen any females?" Evelyn encouraged Will's early interest in ornithology. She turned onto the highway.

"Nope.. But I don't want him to leave. Maybe Dad should leave instead." He was joking, really, but his voice was bitter. When his mother didn't answer, Will wished he hadn't said anything.

After a few minutes, during which time Will had turned on the radio to cover the silence, his mother asked, "Should we go to the big store or the little one? If we go to the little store, Mr. Fiebig's Mart, we can swing by Camp Lady Bug and peek in on Lucy and Peter."

"O.K.." But Will didn't really care one way or the other. Lucy and Peter were too young to count, it seemed. They loved camp, crafts, water wings, paints, and pulling Thunder's tale. But they didn't really think. Not yet, anyway. It was so easy for them not to. Will clicked the ashtray in the door of the car open and closed, open and closed, until his mother told him to stop fidgeting. "It's burning in here," he claimed, and she turned up the air.

"Passing Camp Lady Bug on the left," his mother called out. Will turned his head. The kids were in the pool, going down the slide. The counselors had hooked the hose at the top of the slide so there was running water to help keep the hot surface slippery. Will remembered pushing his body down the same slide with no running water, his legs sticking to the hard plastic painfully.

Hanging on to the buggy in the store, Will helped his mother choose dinner. Avocados, tomatoes, and lemon for guacamole, chips, fresh squash and onion, garlic, lettuce, pine nuts, and boneless, skinless chicken and lobster for the grill. Will found a dog chew for Thunder.

"Do we need ice-cream?" Will loved Bryers. The frozen food sections of stores made him shiver, but he felt that picking the right ice-cream was worth risking the cold. "Can I get some?"

"If it'll make you happy."

"It will." He had already chosen two, vanilla for the grownups and mint chocolate chip for everyone else. "It's the kids' favorite," he claimed when his mother looked at the word mint and made a face.

"And yours! I know who keeps buying that stuff," Evelyn teased Will. It seemed the easiest way to communicate with her ten year-old. Telling him Bridget was leaving would be more difficult. She decided to just mention it the next time Bridget's name came up.

Walking back to the car, Will carrying both bags, Evelyn noticed how long his legs were. Straight, but stretched-looking, like his father's. Will was bowlegged, his knees not touching as he stood with his feet together, waiting for his mother to open the trunk. Tiny red dots lit up on his arms and legs as Evelyn approached.

"The ants must have gotten you. Do you sting?" She unlocked the doors and helped him unload.

"No. Maybe they're mosquitoes. I'm careful about ants."

"But they're tiny. Sometimes you can't see them."

"Bridget has some bug stuff. I should wear 'Off.'" Will climbed in the front seat. The air in the car was hot and thick to breathe. "It's always burning in here."

Evelyn turned on the car, the air on high and cold. When she had pulled out on to the road, she asked, "What would you say if I told you Bridget was leaving?"

"Where's she going?" Will looked straight ahead.

"Home. New York. I don't really know."

"I think maybe it'd be good for her to go. I mean, we don't really need her help anymore, not as much as we used to. And I can help with the kids." Will searched for a good reason. But he knew why Bridget had to go. He saw her kiss his father, didn't he? Through the crack.

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"I asked her to leave. Tonight. Your father agreed that it was the best solution." The traffic was dense, the highway full of summer people just coming out to the beach for the season. Evelyn had to stop talking in order to concentrate and make her turn. "Do you understand, Will?"

"What does Dad have to do with it, anyway?"

"Nothing. It was my decision. He went along with me because I'm right. He loves us all. You know that, don't you?" Evelyn found it hard to ask Will questions. His answers weren't always what she wanted to hear. Will had crossed his legs Indian-style on the seat and was looking out the window, at the front of their house, the painted mailbox.

"What are we going to do with all the left-over paint? All that blue paint." Will clicked the ashtray frantically. "It's a waste of paint! What should we do, Mom? We can't paint everything blue!" He started to cry.

Evelyn had pulled up to the house and stopped the car. She hugged Will. He felt small when he shook.

"It's O.K.. to be angry. It's O.K.. to feel this way, Will," she told him. "Do you want to say good-bye to her?"

Will nodded. He needed to see her.

"We better get your ice-cream inside before it melts all over."

Evelyn let him go.

Will found Bridget in her room, sitting on the bed. Seeing her he felt calm. Her things were packed—all her books, clothes, make-up, shoes and souvenirs. Bridget was a collector. She had the ticket stub from every concert she'd ever been to, labels torn off beer bottles and fruit juices from around the world, stamps she thought were pretty, and trinkets from every place she thought she'd never see again. Will had been part of her collection; but she couldn't take him with her.

"Your room is so empty," Will told her, standing in the doorway. Nothing hung on the white walls, her shelves were cleared, and the room had a muggy feel.

"It's not quite as littered as it was, is it?" But he knew she loved litter in a room. He knew her. He watches her, running her fingers through her dark hair, sigh and then smile.

"Did you come to say good-bye?" She looked beautiful to him.

"Yes. But I want to ask you a question."

"What?" She looked so beautiful that he didn't want her to leave him. He walked forward, his face in front of hers, and he kissed her.

"What should I do with all that blue paint?"

JOSH MAY

Statue

to be some autumn greek torso slick
with wet leaves a continually balanced
colloid brisk with smoothed over non-eyes
and new colors that rot just quick enough
for spring that could care less for appendages
and have only the desire to feed someone new
grapes but whose pedestal is locked in transit

erosion to be a gargoye and feel
time depositing your grains in anything
but random rain patterns explicitly binary
in function fear or be feared with no true
option of pheromones and only obligated
to watch some centuries of anyones from towers
too distant to distinguish with sight

screwed to the last I am perpetually in flux
cracks can't always be considered change
recognize bronze marble terra-cotta ivory
for what they are — slow flesh
so fuck eternal and fuck next week
because I will stand regardless of rationale
I have no frequency or singularity

ALYCE CROWDER

But sometimes you ask for too much

Because I do not know if you were saying
goodbye to me or a different hello
or nothing at all, just beautiful smalltalk but
I can remember you in your suspenders and short hair
and now you talk about chilled knives
and ostrich plumes when you talk about sex
and you said let me read the poem.
and you said live with me in Europe.
and I said I have no money.
and you said I can care for you.

I had just gotten to the point
where I could love you on your terms
I had insisted we were like siblings.
I had stayed away and found other men.
I had taken to my bed someone
I considered the opposite of you.
A child, a misogynist, a lover of rare steak.
and you said I can care for you.
and you said I don't want you to be hurt.
and I said it always happens that way.
and you said I would never hurt you.

After three years you came to visit.
You noted the subtle shrines to you
on my desks and walls and tables.
You began to smell of my shampoo and soaps
you made the air in my house
in my rooms yours
You made yourself part of everything
I had created to stop thinking about you.
and you said I would never hurt you.
and you said let me do this for you.
and I said I can never tell you no.
and you said let me do this for you.

Your legs were long and you seemed larger.
A down comforter thrown on the hardwood floor and
you had started the cheap tea lights waltzing;
in them your skin was a pale that hurt my eyes.
Your hair was thick and long and wrapped around
your face like a crazed old man.
and you said let me do this for you.
and you said be honest with me.
and I said what can I do.
and you said let me read the poem.



JOHNNY GOU

The Asian Women

Pinpricks, Mother,
 To kill the old man's peach and raise
 Your own jade. Out back
 of those green-handed nights on the river.
 Alone. Paunch-heavy, pulling laundry from the sky.

*Look you'd say water-shimmies fireflies are dragons
 Dragons-under-the-water skate slick-upside-down mirror-slick
 Of water-spiders 'fore they gobble 'em up prow of boats 'fore they sink 'um*

This
 As you'd fold laundry. Kiln-fire
 Honing the clay hands blind,
 Until raw meat-stumps. Until needles
 Discipline the mountain
 Of its stone;
 And the woman-sweat
 Of a thousand years
 Cracks and seeds the flight from home
 With space. Around which
 The earthenware fires, reconstitutes itself:
 Pouring warm, then wizening as lacquer in my porcelain bowl.

*And the monkeys they slick-hollow their frazzled bones back to bowls fill 'um up
 Like this with funny-jade and fruit gone maggot-eggs beads to the river
 Where the lady-in-the-moon jumps into her boat of bone won't come home*

Remember mooncakes, Mother?
 The kiln gone last autumn,
 Grandma
 Had milked the rooster's quivering slit-throat 'live,
 Your stones a mess. Just last autumn,
 Hair gone plum-teeth falling out just able to stand up.

Mother I am here,
 Have come up out of your imaginings whole-
 Up from fissures' dream-mutterings
 Of rotting floor-boards. The kiln gone,
 I subsume more than flame
 Grown strong.
 My beautiful porcelain beak,
 Once your mastered hands, clench to tiny fists
 Indignant sorrow,
 And demand now that marrow give suck,
 That shriveled paunch-face open again
 To the return, with cataract spare enough to thread a needle clean.

*Oops One drops in and they all scram bowls crashing so the lady-spills-to-the-sky
 To-the-moon but not the lady she is the moon Look where she was shimmies
 Fireflies see 'um dragon-slicks-under-the-bridge tricked 'um n' ate 'em up!*

DEBORAH FORBES

Waiting Room

Trees spread like blood vessels
in the dome of an egg;
There is waiting in the secret
rubbing of leaves. I wrap
myself in heavy cloth
against dampness.

I will pull the pot wider on the wheel
to hold water for cooking.
I will throw gold leaves
to make butterflies.

Indian women used to
stem with moss
the flow that beads
my leg. Moss roots
in red clay-
blood back to blood.
I don't know their oracle-
my hands catch on rings.
I fear the staining
of my own skin.

This morning
the grass is wet.
I will walk an hour to see
the butterflies.
They beat wings together.
They are frantic and orange and
smothering in moss.



 WILLIAM EWARD

Where the Sun Goes

"the lengthened shadow of a man is history"

I

Do you remember the morning, quite long ago?

The breath hung all around us;

There was no snow.

And do you remember someone crouching with his arrows and his
bow?

It got so cold and there was no sun

(Nor were there any clouds.)

—'I cannot stay,' said he, 'I cannot stay here, at all.'

Then he frowned and walked away.

—'No, I cannot stay.'

Do you remember bread and wine?

At a crowded table, so unkind

But especially cruel to me.

And do you remember someone stumbling

With a cloth over his eyes, blind?

It got so loud; you had no voice

(Nor did you have any face.)

—'I cannot see,' said he, 'I cannot see here, at all.'

Then he frowned and walked away.

—'No, I cannot see.'

Did I ever believe that there would be a time?

The hollow shells sitting around a table

or fire...

Did I ever believe in the moment, the dream

Of broken down rivers and Aglaia's regime

When everything stops and the System remains

Untouched by furtive glances and insidious brains,

Where the Surroundings are shattered and torn

asunder?

Did it ever happen? Was anyone warned?

A strange moment, I do not recall,

cannot remember ever being born.

And do I still believe that there will be a time?

Rhythmically they stand and withdraw for a table

or fire...

Can I imagine a moment in the routine

A different stanza, chapter, or scene

When eyes lock and words are finally unchained

from weather and gossip and capital gain,

Where stammers and blushings are hidden by

a casual smile?

Do I dare turn the page? Where shall I begin?

Then Morpheus closes the book with a grin

and whispers, 'Our Shangri-la is waiting.'

Do you remember? Can you recall

ever being born?

WILL EWARD

II

Do you remember the day, quite long ago?
The grasses waved together in the wind;
I was still alone.
And do you remember someone reading
A tale of loves and hates?
There was no place for me in the book
(Nor was there any place for you.)
—'I cannot work,' said he, 'I cannot work here, at all.'
Then he frowned and walked away.
—'No, I cannot work.'

Do you remember coats and ties?
In a crowded room, filled with lies
But especially dishonest to me.
And do you remember someone shooting
arrows left and right?
But none hit you and none hit me
(Nor did I think they might.)
—'I have none left,' said he, 'I have none left, at all.'
Then he frowned and walked away.
—'No, I have none left.'

I saw the whirling people
All black and white and white and black
With their corsages and their boutonnieres.
I saw the whirling people and felt myself in tears.

The ceiling was magnificent with its lights and
chandeliers.

And I saw you in the whirling center
All red and pink and green and gold
With your ribbons and your bows.
I saw you in the center and simply had to know...

Who walks so cautiously, eyes away, eyes to the
floor?

For I have viewed the paintings with a glass to my eye,
Seen hideous strokes and wondered 'How? Why?'
Always from across the room do I see a
Morning on the Seine.
In the schoolyards and the graveyards a speck of life
remains,
Trampled footprints, a slab of stone,
Fresh bouquets, a bit of cloth
Shading silent avenues, a speck of life
remains.
From the parlors to the foyers and the foyers to the doors,
What remains of lost chances and sweaty palms?
Empty teacups, crumbs on floors.
For I have seen hideous conversations and wondered 'How?'

 WILL EWARD

Why?’

We talked for hours and never said a thing.
Life is always very strange, awakening in the
Spring.

The nights were cold, the days were warm
and both were very long.

III

Do you remember the afternoon, quite long ago?
The road had cracked and the lines ran deep;
Your hair and your eyes would glow.
And do you remember someone looking
from his mother’s open window?
But not for you and not for me
(Nor for anyone I know.)
—‘I cannot find her,’ said he, ‘I cannot find her,
at all.’

Then he frowned and flew away.
—‘No, I cannot find her.’

Do you remember cakes and teas?
In a crowded parlor, some sugar with ‘Please.’
But tastefully sour to me.
And do you remember someone drowning
In the drink and chat and idle cliché?
The air was thick; there were no smiles
(Nor were there any frowns.)
—‘This is not life,’ said he, ‘this is not life, at all.’
Then he frowned and walked away.
—‘No, this is not life.’

Beethoven was of a lucky sort.
He played so very well
But what can be made of the death of his brother?
One brother dead and the other born blind,
What should be said of the state of his mother,
What memories of birth remain in her head?
And what would be done with the scales and the
keys?

Who would take scraps and broken remains?
Who would take music in exchange for pain?

‘None,’ said Malthus.
‘Ignore him,’ said Keynes.

So pardon, pardon, beg your pardon please.
I would hate to digress or appear a bit selfish
But it seems there are other things clouding my
brain.

And as for impertinence, I know it is not wanted
But I have a question away from these things,
A bit off the subject I readily confess but

WILL EWARD

important just the same...

When you finish your tea and say a farewell
Dare I ask
Dare I be so bold as to say,
 'What about me?'

IV

Do you remember the evening, not so long ago?
The breath hung all around us;
There was no snow.
And do you remember someone stretched out
 on the ground
Not far from his arrows and his bow?
It got so cold and you asked for your shawl
 so, dutifully, I brought it.
And as I stepped out onto the porch I saw one
Rise and take his bow in hand
 and then his face went gray
But he looked at us and lost a grin
 then he walked away.

Do you remember?
Can you recall?

I still have not learned about lost chances.
(I do know a bit about sweaty palms.)
But what can be told by one furtive glance?
Never mind, never mind.

May I have this dance?

KATHERINE GUCKENBERGER

Wishing for Neil

The day my mother left me in a taxi cab began as any other when we lived in New York. I met my mother in the kitchen, had toast and juice for breakfast, tapioca pudding for dessert, and put on my flip-flops and headband.

"I have a big day planned for us," she told me, and I remember collecting all my colored chalks in a stuff sack in case we ended up on the museum steps again, doing rubbings on the crinkly stones.

My mother wore a short flowery skirt and tank-top. Her curly brown hair was pulled back in a scarf tied loosely with long loops and ends. It was red and yellow striped, but every tenth stripe was white. We counted.

"We'll need to pack a lunch," she said, moving toward the fridge. Our apartment was in a carriage house, connected to the main house by a breezeway where we played hide-and-go-seek. I was always "it;" my mother got to hide. The breezeway was full of old furniture, deserted, perfect for hiding. Sometimes she'd give me hints. "Helloooooo! I'm a frog!" And I'd know she was under a tall dresser or pile of blankets the way frogs hid under the beach house near Charleston, where my mother is from.

She made tuna sandwiches with apple on Wonder bread for lunch.

"Who would I play with if I didn't have you?" she'd say.

"No-one?"

"I'd be so lonely, baby. You're all I've got."

And I believed her.

"She was crazy, Ellie, it wasn't your fault." My father is a biology professor. We live in Charleston, in an old pink Charleston single, the kind of house that is thin and high and has a porch on one side. I love the house, his wife, new baby, and life.

"I know, I know it wasn't my fault. But we're so settled, Dad. And she's not." Rachel has the baby on her lap. Sam. He has a birth mark on his lip that's supposed to disappear as he grows up. It looks like a tiny cherry, puffy and red. He's blond and small like I was. Rachel looks like my mother.

Ten years and I still can't talk to her on the phone.

"She's voluntarily committed, El. She can leave whenever she wants," my father says. He looks old to me. His hair is gray on the sides and in the back. He puts on his hat, a fishing cap with a visor and ear-flaps to protect him from the sun. His father got skin cancer at fifty.

"You going to the country?" Rachel asks. My father goes most weekends to the Johns Island country place to putter around. He clears land, plants veggies, cuts weeds, burns brush, fishes, shrimps, crabs, and grows grapes.

"I'll be back early," he assures us, painting his face sloppily with Nuskote. His khakis are stained and smell like rotten mullet up close and his work boots are soft leather covered in creek slime.

"I might get Ellen to help me with Sam," Rachel smiles at me. "And I'll work on the porch furniture. Three pieces left to paint."

We start our day.

My mother calls on my birthday every year. And every year my father tells her, at my request, that I can't come to the phone. Sometimes I write out a sentence or two, a brief explanation of my life, what I like and don't like, what I remember about being with her. But I can't tell her. I don't want her to know I miss it.

Sam sits in his play-pen on the porch. He picks up a stuffed rabbit and then a rattle. The Charleston sun is hot in town, and I think of my father in the country.

"Where's our Daddy, Sam? Huh? Where is he?" I tickle him and he looks at me and frowns. "He's riding the old red tractor down to the dock, isn't he? Yes, he is, and then he's going to catch us some shrimp for supper."

Sam opens his mouth as if to speak but grunts instead.

"Everything o.k.?" Rachel asks, coming through the screen door, a can of spray paint in one hand, a stack of newspapers under the opposite arm.

"Yeah. We're just hanging out here, aren't we, Sam?" Sam sees his mother and tries to stand up. "Do you think Neil will call tomorrow?" I ask Rachel.

"It's your sixteenth, Ellen. She knows that. I'm sure she'll call." Rachel walks down the steps to the yard and starts to unfold the newspapers on the grass. Sometimes I think Rachel wishes I'd just talk to her. Say hi. Tell her we're all fine. Rachel sympathizes with Neil.

I watch her bend at the waist easily to smooth the newspapers and move a freshly scraped iron chair with her long, tan arms. She's wearing an old pair of Levi's and a faded pink t-shirt, twisted in a knot at the bottom and tucked into the jeans. Her hair is pulled back off her neck in a loose

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pony-tail, her long silver fish earrings shine.

I remember getting into the taxi with my mother.

"We're going into the city, baby. Isn't this exciting?" She wore her ballet slippers that day, the elastics hugging the sides of her ankles. I sat with my sack of chalks and box lunch on the seat next to her. We looked out the window at the buildings flying by. We tried to count them but they went too fast.

"But where are we going?" I asked her.

"It's a secret," she said in a whisper so the taxi driver wouldn't hear. "But I'll tell you because you're my baby. I've had the most wonderful idea. I'm going to talk to Ballanchine."

"Oh, Ballanchine," I said, and wondered who he was.

"El! Earth to Ellen! Will you throw me some more newspapers? I'm painting the grass out here," Rachel calls up to me. "There's some in the front hall closet."

"O.k." I tell her, and then say to Sam, "You stay here, baby. Try not to miss me."

Our house smells like Gordon's antique flea market because Rachel dusts with a musty wax. She says it reminds her of her grandmother's house in Maine. Old smelling. My father cuts camellias at the country and brings them home to her and she puts them out in silver bowls of water. She says her grandmother always had fresh flowers. She reminds me of myself, sometimes, thinking all the time about her family.

I find a stack of New York Times Sunday editions on the closet floor. We keep everything. Stacks of newspapers, plastic bags, magazines, recipes, and anything we might need later fill our closets. The front hall closet is designated "paper products."

I throw the papers over the side of the porch and they land with a thud in a neat pile.

"Thanks. That should do," Rachel tells me. "How's Sam?"

"Tired. Chewing on a plastic ring. Think he's hot in that jumpsuit?" I look at the light blue terry-cloth that covers most of Sam. There's a duck on the front, holding an umbrella.

"You can take it off him. He'll be fine in his Pampers." Rachel turns back to the chair and I pull Sam's hot body out of the suit.

"Is that better?" I ask him. "How's my baby?"

Later, alone in my room, staring at the crack in the corner on the ceiling, I daydream. Daydreams are fantasies. Mine aren't real because I only imagine the impossible.

The dream Neil is young, the way she looked the day she left me in the taxi. She looks like Rachel does now. She comes to my door and asks if I want to play. I tell her I'm too old, of course, that tomorrow is my sixteenth birthday. She is sad. I know she's lonely and that it wasn't her fault. I tell her it's not because she left me alone, it's because I'm too old. I'm too old and she's too young. She looks younger than Rachel does now. She looks sixteen, beautiful and healthy, the way she looked when my father met her in high school. The way she looks in her debutante gown, her wedding dress, and even my christening. But then she looks older, she's thinner, and her hair isn't as curly and light. When I can't picture her anymore she is gone, and I can hear her voice on the phone, talking to my father, who's own voice is soft and sad. No, he says, she can't come to the phone. And the daydream is over because suddenly it is real and there is no other ending.

Supper is simple, but it is our favorite. I say "our favorite" because we all agree that peeling shrimp over newspapers on the kitchen table and dipping them in garlic, mayonnaise, and mustard sauce is fun. We eat as we peel. Sam watches, and eats spoon-fed mashed carrots. We take turns feeding him. We listen to Bonnie Raitt. We eat ice-cream for dessert and my father tells us about the country.

"First of all, the truck blew a wheel out by the Franks' farm. You might wonder what I was doing out there—but Bill told me I could pick a few of the ripe tomatoes because he couldn't sell them anyway," he smiles and points to a basket of red, red tomatoes. "Enough to last us a week. And free, too."

My father loves a deal. I remember driving all the way to Columbia to look at a brass bed. "This is what you wanted, isn't it?" he asked me.

"Yes, but I didn't know we'd have to drive half-way across the state to find it. Annie Davidson got hers downtown."

"And paid a pretty penny, I bet. This one is fifty bucks. Good condition—would go for at least a hundred downtown." He smiled then, too. I remember thinking that I could always sell it and make him a profit. Then he haggled with the man at the store and bought it for forty.

"Anyway, back to the real story," my father continues. "I had to change the wheel right there. Hot as hell today. But we managed." He scrapes a pile of shrimp shells to the side with the back of his hand.

"Who's we?" I ask.

"Let me guess," Rachel says. "We is a group of migrant laborers who work the tomato fields." She picks Sam up and heads for the porch. "I think I heard this story last week," she laughs and leaves.

KATHERINE GUCKENBERGER

"She's right. But last week we pulled Bill's tractor out of a ditch next to Puckett road." My father wants to move to the country, to the little red and white cabin next to the marsh. Rachel thinks it's too small. Three rooms.

"Well, I won't bore you, El."

"You don't bore me. Thanks for the tomatoes. Maybe we can make lasagna or something." I remember hearing my father tell Neil once that all he needed was his fishing pole and he'd be happy. Not his job, his books, his house or even his wife. But that was years ago.

"We want to do something special for you birthday," he tells me, folding the newspapers on top of each other to clear the table. "Any ideas?"

Summer birthdays are always forgotten. Friends are at camp, working at the beach, or just out of touch. Neil used to throw a neighborhood party for me in New York, but I never knew any of the kids. Twice my father came. He wore a birthday hat and sat next to me at the picnic table. But he didn't sit by Neil.

"She might call."

"Ellen, she might come." My father looks sad. He sits back down, newspapers in his lap. "I meant to tell you yesterday when she called. She wants to see you."

"You don't have to look so upset, Dad, you don't have to see her." I am annoyed.

"That's not why I'm upset. I want you to work things out with Neil. I know it's not easy."

I am not listening to him anymore. His voice sounds far away. It's not easy, I think. You don't understand. You left her. She didn't leave you, jump out of a cab on Fifth Avenue and leave you in the backseat with a stranger at the wheel. It's easy for you. You left her. Years before. She didn't leave you all alone.

"You should have told me. Yesterday. You should have given me time. I don't know if I can see her, Dad." I stand up. There is a picture in my mind of Neil, my mother, doing a cartwheel. Her short flowery skirt flares and her legs split like two quick flashes of light. Then again. Her ballet slippers form perfect points as she spins. She looks back once, as if to make sure I'm still safe in the cab. "Damn, did you see that?" the cab driver asks me. "Your momma's a nut! Where's she going? Hey! Hey, Lady! Come back here—you forgot your kid!" He yells out the open window but she is already gone.

The dream Neil enters the room quietly and sits on the end of the bed. She watches me sleep. I look young, like I did when I was six, a headband holding my hair in place. When I open my eyes, she smiles at me. Ellen, Ellen, Ellen. I missed you, she says. I hope we can be friends. Her face is hopeful, her eyebrows raised high. Yes, I tell her. She leans to kiss me and I sit up to hug her tightly. I look at the ceiling for the familiar crack in the plaster. Did you talk to Ballanchine? I ask. No, she says. he wasn't home. She laughs. I'm sorry I left you. I know, I tell her. And I wake up wishing for my mother.



JOSH MAY

To be an Effective Agent you must

Sing dead songs as though you believe they are self-fulfilling prophecies,
Believe they are self-fulfilling prophecies,
Bury the past covers under pillows,
Take a few shots before the mission so you forget it and they can't even
beat it out of you,
Stare at the enemy like they know everything you know,
Realize lit candles are beacon light towers that can lead you to the foe's inner
zones, but never carry one yourself,
Eat flesh you can't digest even if it means you've got to cut yourself up
later to get it out again ,
Remember to blame the scars on women. When you say, "It was her
razor claws" it will re-emphasize your cover,
Wear short hair and a large cowl so no one can aim for your brain,
Change your password regularly,
Claim insanity if your cover is blown (submitting to electroshock therapy
will give credence),
Sever your open dream lines. Anything, at any distance, could connect
and alter or receive your reports,
Don't use bait, be bait. You don't have control over anything else,
Keep clear files, but disguise them as toilet paper with shit already on it
or as rolling paper,
Drive and walk just a bit faster,
Discreetly check for bugs in terra-cotta pots and on anyone foriegn to
you by feigning infatuation,
Never ask anyone, under any circumstances, especially if you think they
are on your side, "Who are you an agent for?"



CHRISTOPHER PHILLIPS

Salems

Only my grandfather greets me with *goddammit*,
Goddammit, how the hell are you,
Goddammit where the hell have you been
when I had just seen him the night before.
Goddammit is an embrace
always followed with a kiss on my lips.

We are moving up to Atlanta, and he will stay here.
Clarence, an old friend of his from Norristown,
recently moved down after his own wife died.
Every Monday they walk to the pool hall
for chili dogs, the fleshy lobes of granpop's large ears
hanging below his Phillies hat.
If there is one thing that old people don't want disrupted
it is their eating schedule.
My grandfather says the pool hall
has the best chili dogs in the world.

When he lived with my grandmother
and my father on Swede Street in Norristown
he worked in a sewing machine factory.
He smells of Singer machine oil
and Salem cigarettes. After dinner
at our house he smokes in the driveway,
his broad back to the window,
one hand on the hip of his brown pants,
looking up into the trees.

This is how his wife died,
though she was eight years younger.
Her oxygen tank sits quiescent in the closet
of their apartment, its barrel a mottled blue-gray.
Her bed is still made, and he has taken
to using it as a wardrobe.
A variety of pressed cotton shirts, collars wide,
rest on the lacework of her spread.

The tank will not be used again.
I think my grandfather will die a smoker,
he will die in bed, the nighttable next to him
between their modest twins,
the low dark nighttable
with the dish of yellow buttermints
and the clean crystal ashtray.
I smoked a pack of Salems once
and smelled him around me,
on my own breath.



JOSH MAY

Of Each Fair Day I Still Give You Half

no one sees locks stories and plastic beads
in a satchel everywhere but you
take turns lines and two kings at one time
there are several martyred tunes to dance quick
but more room corners to strangle a gaze
and a punch bowl nearby and a one for me
a moment of Lear blind lets eyes drop
on a wish we were somewhere tiara
kneeling for a lost quarter of an hour
any sacrifices kisses pennies on the floor
will wait for the lights or Richard's return
and a glancing blow is the last to know
calculated collisions will never again meet
hush the cookie tins carry a Spanish fleet

MICHAEL WITTMANN

Picasso's Horse

This morning they raped the Sabine
This afternoon they bombed Guernica
And all day Picasso's Horse screamed

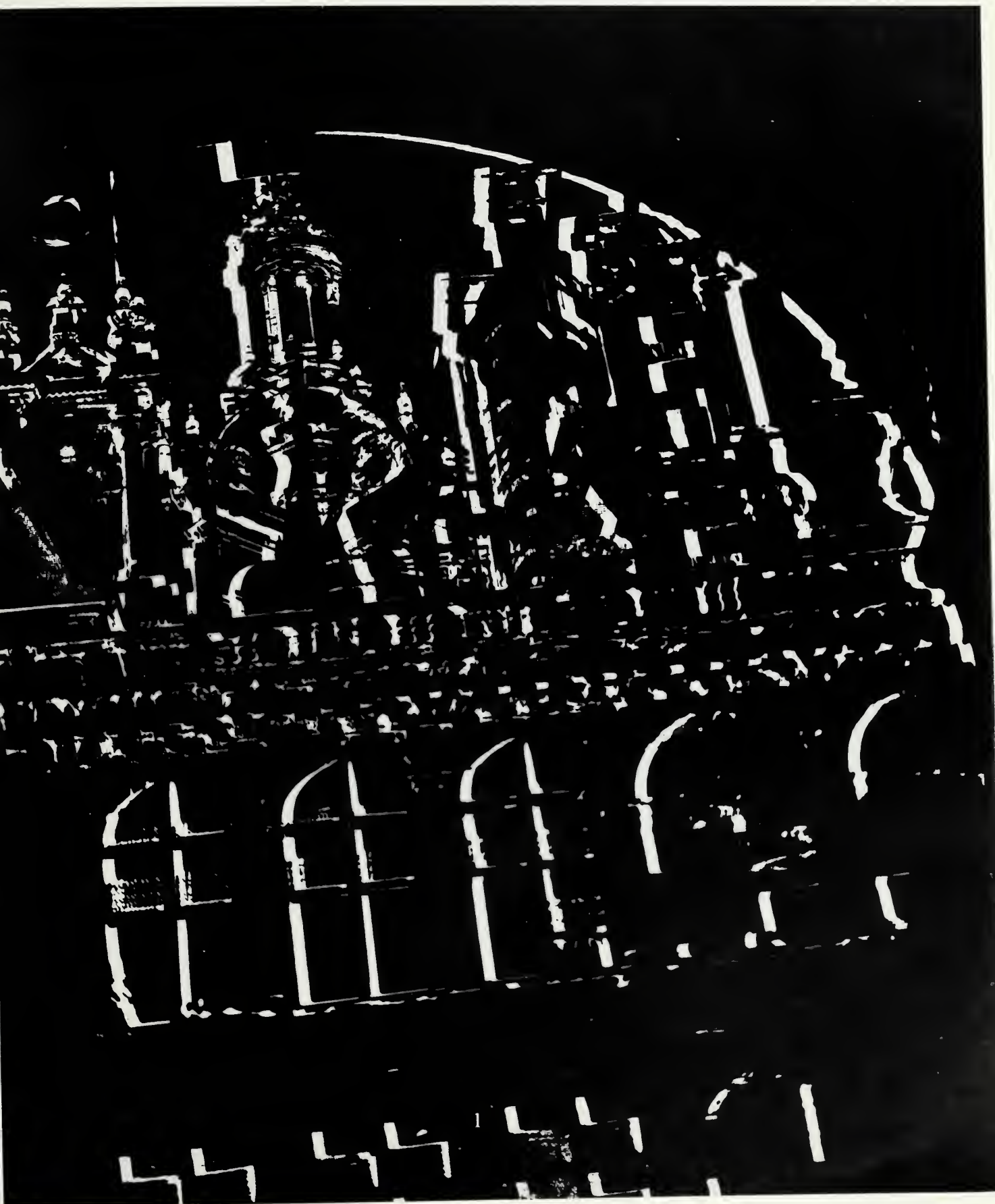
 The bombs fell, the dead piled high,
 The dying screamed, violence reigns in the sky.
The dagger came down at her
The point thrust out at her
The rider drooling down at her
The arm swinging toward her
 (the horse screaming at her)
And the hooves already touched her
And the horse frothed at the mouth
And his eyes were frenzied and wild
And the hooves already touched her
 And Picasso's Horse was screaming.
The burning buildings were made for us
The mother's babies murdered for us
The bodies torn apart for us
The hope ripped away from us
 (the horse screaming with us)
And faceless they smashed down on us
And violence rained down on the town
And a sword lay broken in a clenched hand
And faceless they smashed down on us
 As Picasso's Horse was screaming.
The thrust and the pain
Violation again and again,
 Horse above or below, it's all the same.

Nothing was in black and white
All of it in shades of grey
And all day, Picasso's Horse screamed.





Archiv





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Night on Johns Island

I thought we'd get married, someday, when Jay told me it was time to meet his father. We drove from Washington to Johns Island, South Carolina, and I asked Jay why he'd never even mentioned him. "He's just not part of my life, that's all." Why not? "He left when I was ten. Moved to the island. Eventually I guess we just lost touch."

I remember getting nervous as we turned on Bohicket Road and the shopping centers and gas stations began to disappear. Spanish moss hung from the live oaks and the sun could barely get through the thick overgrowth. Tiny road-side stands selling peaches, okra, and watermelons sat under the trees, leaning lazily against the thick trunks.

"How about if we find a spot on the creek and camp tonight," Jay said to me as we passed a small shack with no roof.

"What happened to that house?"

"Hurricane, and no insurance. Do you want to pick up some corn?"

"Camping's fine with me," I told him as he pulled off the road and stopped next to an old man selling corn out of a sweetgrass weaved basket. "But I thought we were staying at your father's."

"Well, it doesn't really matter because he's not expecting us. And I want to show you around first." Jay rolled down his window and paid the man. "Hold these," he said and handed me four ears of white corn.

"What do you mean? Why isn't he expecting us?" A few mosquitoes had flown in Jay's open window and I smashed them all with one finger on the dashboard.

"Great. Are you going to clean those off?" He wasn't mad. But he used that sarcastic voice.

"Sure," I told him, and lifted a tennis hose to scrape the dashboard with its sole. "So, you didn't tell him we were coming."

"He doesn't have a phone."

"Of course he does! Why wouldn't he have a phone?" I began shucking a piece of the corn. You can eat corn raw, if it's fresh. White is the best. I remember feeding fresh corn to my dogs. They ate the kernels by holding the

corn on both ends with their paws, and then guarded the cobs like bones.

"My father never had a phone. He's never needed one." Jay looked straight ahead. He's taken off his New England Patriots hat. His curly brown hair was long all over, and I wondered if he could see well enough to drive.

"How do you see through that hair?" My own was pulled back in a long pony-tail.

"You get used to it," he said, but self-consciously tucked some of the longer curls behind his right ear.

I pulled the thin yellow fibers off the corn and then snapped it in two. "Here, have half," I told him.

"What are you doing?"

"What do you mean, what am I doing? I'm having some corn. Do you want some or not?" I threw the scraps out the window just as we pulled on to a dirt road with fields of tomatoes on both sides. "This is pretty," I said, and took a crunchy bite.

"That corn is raw," Jay told me, as if I didn't already know.

"Right. I guess you don't want yours." I threw his out the window. He stopped the car.

"What's with you?" He looked at me.

"What's with you? Why'd you stop?"

"Why did you throw that corn out the window?"

"Why didn't you tell me that your father has no idea we're coming?"

"That has nothing to do with the corn."

"That has everything to do with the corn."

"Whatever."

"Yeah, whatever." I took another bite of the corn. "It's really good. If you could just relax and try something new."

He started the car and slowly accelerated. When he began going too fast his head hit the ceiling of the car as we rolled over hidden bumps.

"This car's too small for you." His hair had fallen back over his face, hiding him from me. I tucked it back behind his ear for him.

"Thanks. We're almost there. If we make it by low tide we can do some crabbing before we set up the tent. I bought some bait." He looked tired, even though I'd done most of

the driving from Washington. The tomato fields seemed to stretch on for miles.

"Sorry I gave you a hard time," I told him. I threw my finished cob out the window. "Maybe we could sleep under the stars."

"Sure, on the dock. It'll be great. We don't even need the tent. I forgot all about the dock," he said, speaking more to himself than to me. He pushed in a tape. Janis Joplin, and I knew he was excited.

"I've never been crabbing, I have to admit," I told him as he tied a chicken leg to a piece of string.

"We need a weight for this line," he said. "Can you think of anything?"

"A rock? Car keys?"

"Perfect. I'll make you a line and then look for a good rock."

"But I don't know what to do. What if I lose the keys?"

He tied the keys to the line and dropped it off the dock into the water. "You won't, unless you drop the whole line. Where'd that stick go? Here. Hold this while I make you a handle." I held the stick as he tied it to the string. "There. Now you just wait. Pull it up slowly after a few minutes and if you see a crab on it or even feel one, I'll get it with the net." He kissed me. "This is great."

Great. I sat there concentrating on not dropping the line. The wood from the old dock gave me tiny splinters on the backs of my legs until Jay handed me an old square life preserver to sit on. It was covered in sand and the arm straps were ripped. "Where'd you find this? And where'd it come from?" He was holding a long pole with a green net on the end.

"The boat house. My father keeps all his old stuff there."

"He crabs down here?"

"I don't know. He used to. I guess he still does."

We sat there looking out at the marsh. The long-stemmed grasses moved slowly back and forth. "Is this his land?"

"His family's, yes. Mine too, I guess. That's an egret," Jay said, pointing to a long white bird flying low across the green water.

"It's beautiful here." I wanted him to

know I could tell.

"Have you checked your line?"

"No, should I?"

"Slowly. If you've got one you don't want to scare him away."

I gently pulled the string and wrapped it around the stick. "I feel something! Jay, get the net."

"Relax. It could just be the weight of the keys you feel."

"No. It's moving. I think I've got one."

"O.k. Keep it slow." He lowered the net as the crab rode to the surface, a greedy claw attached to the chicken leg. "Got him."

"He's a big one. Now what?"

"We need something to put him in. Damn." Jay stood there with the crab in the net, angry now, but still holding on to the chicken. "I'm going to dump him out on the dock and you'll have to step on him and hold him here while I go find a bucket."

"No. I'm not doing that."

"Come on. We'll lose him if you don't."

"I'll dump him and you step on him."

"O.k. But that's even more dangerous since you'll have to use your hand down here on the net to shake him loose."

"O.k. I'll step."

"Get him from behind so we can pick him up after this. And don't step too hard, just hold him there."

As he spoke he shook the crab loose and I jumped up and chased him down in my tennis shoes. When I had secured him in place, Jay left to find the bucket.

Two hours later we'd caught eight blue crabs. We had to throw the females back in, and the little one, but the males were ready to be picked. They were gurgling water, fighting with each other, and trying to climb the high vertical walls of the bucket.

"We're going to do this while they're still alive. Are you up for this?" Jay had already lured one crab out of the bucket on a stick. "My father taught me how to do this. We did this all the time."

He lowered the crab on to the dock and

stepped on its back. Then he picked it up behind the claws and then quickly pulled one of the pinchers down and off. It popped right out into his hand. The crab frantically grabbed the empty air with its remaining claw.

"This is disgusting, Jay. I'm not doing it. That poor crab."

"Fine." He twisted off the second claw. I watched as he peeled the belly off. Jay repeated the speech his father must have given him. "This is the apron. It pulls right off and then you can use it to prod off the shell." With a spurt of water and juice the shell fell off. "Now you can clean the body. Get rid of the gills--these string things. Rip off the mouth and break the body in half. Rinse in cold water," he dipped the remains of the crab in another bucket of water, "and he's ready to be steamed."

"I don't know who you're talking to. I'm not doing that."

"It's kind of like shucking corn," Jay laughed. "Why don't you just relax and try something new?"

"You're not funny. I'll start the fire."

"We have a rule in my family. You don't get any meat unless you help pick."

"Good thing I'm not in your family," I told him and went to look for some wood.

Alone in the dark I tried to look for something familiar. I couldn't find the dirt road, and ended up in a small forest of pine trees. I remembered standing outside my house in Lexington, wearing a Casper the Friendly Ghost Halloween costume from Walgreen's, holding an empty orange, plastic pumpkin. My parents stood in the doorway, both smiling, waving good-bye, telling me to be home by eight, to be careful, to be nice to the shy kids. The pine trees in Lexington were much taller.

Turning back toward the creek, I found enough kindling to fill my backpack. The moon was brighter and I could see the boathouse and where the creek curved around the marsh. I imagined the man who lived here. Wrapped up in loneliness and beauty. But why would he leave his family?

I followed the edge of the creek back to the dock, wondering about Jay's life. His

mother had re-married, stayed at home to raise Jay, made peach leather candy and molasses brownies. My feet felt cloddish on the muddy bank. I got the feeling she thought I was boyish. Or just dirty.

I didn't know anything about his father, except that he didn't have a phone and didn't know we were crabbing and camping on his dock and coming for a visit. I had a feeling he wouldn't be judgmental. He's the one who left his family. But I didn't know what to expect, and as I approached the dock and saw Jay lying there, his legs swinging over the edge, I had a feeling that he didn't either.

"That was quick," he called to me when he heard my footsteps. "Scared of the dark?"

"No, I just thought you might be lonely."

"I always am."

"So am I." I lowered the backpack and sat next to him. But not as lonely as you.

The next morning I woke up early in the brightness. Jay had already rinsed and returned the buckets and net to the boathouse and was sitting under a live oak tree near the car. I watched him and he didn't move. He just sat there, waiting, and I knew he was waiting for me.

"I'm awake, if you're wondering." I stretched.

"How'd you sleep?"

"O.k. You kicked. The nails in this board hurt. I should have brought a pillow. You know, not great." I'm not much of a camper. I tried to sit up.

"We don't have to zip the bags together next time."

"Yes, we do. It's my favorite thing about camping with you." I pulled my hair back and put on my shoes. The creek was at low tide again. Tiny fiddler crabs with one big claw ran sideways in and out of their holes in the mud. "That was an amazing dinner last night."

"Fresh crab is the best." Jay's hair fell over his eyes, but he didn't shake his head or bother to tuck it behind his ears.

"I think this place is even more beautiful in the day." I rolled up the sleeping bags and

packed my backpack. I had a feeling that Jay was ready to go. He still hadn't moved. He just watched me.

"Just like you."

"What?" I asked him. I put on his Patriots cap.

"What would you say about driving down to Georgia today? We used to go horseback riding on the beach at Sea Island. I think you'd really like it." He twisted a piece of bark off a branch, pulling it side to side until it peeled easily into his hand. He lifted it to his nose, smelled it and then threw it over his shoulder. "How about it? Do you want to go?"

"What do you want me to say?" I had to ask. I had to be sure he didn't want to stay, to see his father.

"Yes." I stood in front of him and he looked up at me. He rested the top of his head on the trunk of the tree and his curls fell into his natural part.

"I love horses."

"That's all I needed to hear." He stood up, looked around one last time and said, "Let's not forget anything. We can't forget anything."

And even though we never got married, I knew we never would.



Winnemucca

In Winnemucca, Nevada, the gentry of hefty belt buckle are teasing Thighmasters with lit, filterless Chesterfields. They gather in Blake's house, scratching their crotches unaware and spinning a mantra of t-ball no-hitters that his dad reported in the newspaper of soy-bean ink ("give my friends some press, please, Mr. Smith"), braiding an effigy of James Stockdale from Stetson straps. Turquoise rings litter the seven-dollar rug beneath the window lined with bicentennial quarters that I try to pick away so I can buy some batteries later on. I can't call and ask mom for money again because she's in the hospital, top floor with a view of the smoke stacks at the edge of town. She's already died once on the operating table, and, no, Andy, the cover of *Sticky Fingers* does not bode the fluidity of life and death. The quarters refuse to yield, and the lacquer tattoos my finger nails. Damn the batteries; I lost that tape back in Colorado, where the wolves named Barnabas bayed beside our van, Melita and I shivering beneath the only sleeping bag. Mom was alive then, and still she is.

The men attempt absolution as they embalm Admiral Stockdale so they can give him a Viking funeral in the only dry riverbed in town. They subtract their belt buckles, show off the chipped teeth lining each, and weigh them upon a triple-beam of the kind Mr. Ireland used when the spit wire bound his lips and I still did the homework ("now, Miss, calculate the resultant vector of the incarnation of infidelity and the birth of Emma Bovary"). I have no copper sulfate to offer them, no vitriol to taunt a jackrabbit ensnared in a witch-tooth trap, because I forgot to swipe some from the chemistry lab when Joey stuffed the downtown fountain with ten pounds of laundry soap across from the sculpture that Teresa wants to pummel with milk cartons under the next harvest moon, but, no, we'll forget again, more coins strung along the telephone wires--only here is the tavern where we'll plot that trailer park war.

A fun house mirror on the opposite wall distorts my figure so I can skip along the

beach, tits wrapped in cellophane so I won't cry over the beach fled, the sand abiding, but the lady in the mirror tells me to dance for the men, anyway. I haven't enough veils to fool them, so I watch them replace the belt buckles with those riddled Thighmasters. They scratch their sideburns in unison, ask me, "can we have some extreme unction, Miss?"

I reply, "I know not of what you speak," and turn to recite the Martyrology from Saint Stephen to John Lennon. They cry for a fortnight, unabated. Melita's mom, wearing the habit she drenched in flame while the spider nuns baked my fifteenth birthday cake in Tiffin, taps me on the shoulder, hands me the tape that I lost in Colorado, says, "We'd better get going. We've got quite a drive ahead to reach San Francisco by morning."

"Do you think any drug stores are open so I can buy some batteries for later on?"

"I don't think that many drug stores are around here, but we can try. So, you're not going to make us pay for the batteries, too?," she tickles the small of my back, pinches my ear lobe with clipped finger nails. "To think that I even had to teach you table manners."

I recite another page, and we bid the men good-bye, leaving them in a mire of cigarette ash and spent allusions. Outside the sole Revco in Winnemucca there is a mustard love bus holding the surviving fans of Foghat. They are giving themselves Toni perms with greased Allen wrenches, minus the neutralizer. I buy the damn batteries, think of mom without her cigarettes, and try so desperately to hide that those whining casino lights are making me cry. I want to forget this-- please remind me that never before have I played this game. The specter rises unfettered within the fun house mirror. She reaped that part of my skull, and mom is still alive. Driving through Nevada at night, only the premonition of lights fifty miles ahead along with the infidels soldered to the cactus folds offer solace. I forgot the constellations that pierce the salt licks below, unabated.

Virginia Mountain Love Song

I roll wheels faster through
watery landscape -
roads are rivers,
trees float gold.
Among these autumn reds, this harvest I
wait for my moon's blood, not ready
for it to clot into
something separate. I need
the rock-faced mountain, the resistance
to force a tearing inside.
If I cannot shed this richness
I will drown in it.

I want to sleep safe
in the fold of the blueridge
tucked in the movement of roads.

You wait for me at a
white church on the hill
closed for storage.
The glass is not stained - I see
through its clearness
a wrought iron bedpost.
I think of chaste farmbrides,
a white sheet pulled back
in a bare room.
In our room this morning
I plaited my hair in front of the
plug-in heater, red to milk yellow.
I pull a wind-dried white flower
from the soil and weave it
into the pattern, a charm against fruit
I have no hands to harvest,
fertility and rot.

Together at the cemetery
of Rockbridge Pass,
you will not step on graves.
I take off my shoes and
walk where I please
trusting that my feet will not be cut
by grass so clean and mounds soft
as my own body.
A stone says Mattie Eliza
mourns her infant still but
hers is not my season -
my body stirs
and know that I will bleed.

Balanced again,
I no longer need the pulling back
of mountains, the brief tear of
the tombstone. When the sun
turns my time, I will bleed
all the way into the soil, unravel
guiltless
in line with cycles.

And you have waited
holding breath and hands
as red leaves run through my fingers,
and you have known
and I say to you now,
My body is as whole as this landscape.
We have nothing to fear from it.

I will marry you
in the oldest church west of the Alleghenys
as it has been written
“as long as grass grows and
water flows” and
flower, and church
and grave.

Speaking of Rope in the House of a Hanged Man

Huddled black bats from the roof of a cave.
Surrounded by blazers and casserole dishes.
Piano wire taut like a tightwalker's bridge;
the trapeze artist came before and
swung the
 swung and
stilled the crowd.

The daughters in their bedrooms.
This is a new division and
I could lick the salt from the air.

an icicle cold
The second death the front the we.
The third the space from us to you.

Consequence amid stories and condolences:

 one
of us standing, mouth an ancient ivory
sarcophagus; teeth stalactites.
Our faces barely pink,
but pink.

 Conversation choking,

dangling

Should We Feign Death

You've got to wonder if the couch has heard it
before-- a monostitch blessing of the asses and cunts
we want in too particular terms -- everything
an eventual leader in the tape to this one
self-but-doubly-by-everyone-else-proclaimed-beat chick
-- checking who lost it first after the blind utterances
and noticing the numbers thinning by the hit but out
of order I reform gyres and failed heuristic cycles
to match superman then painted indian then kraut
and then any slit blue valentine or reverse that
-- maybe that's her silhouette behind the shower
curtain or inverse gravity zone floating lotus like --
all at once a death camp officer and a buddha she lets me
check out in a mass grave of dreams-- almost positive
that none still stir under the heap it is easy to assume
I am unable to convince the other apostles to abort
the mission -- and even at six o'clock when the sun
finally breaks all the shadow boys against the wall
-- you've got to wonder if the couch was bugged.

Perilous Aspects

How Big'un Got Away

"Its against-" she said,

and I thought rain,

rain any minute,

"Its against God,

is again God- "to dig a grave..."

"What?" "Not if someone's

"gon' be buried in it,"

Somedays, I thought, somedays make you go.

And it was a black streak,

in the dirt, and there he was,

"What?"

"A fabric, "it was a fabric-

she had on a blue and white dress,

"what she's buried in,"

"an its a sin!

and I knew by the clouds

by the barn's color, and by the tin-roof

"charrin, Charring away at you"

it would be rain any minute, Andy says.

"And, Andy, "its the humming of the world

"alone in your skull, it told you horseflies,"

"you followed it,

into the rain, it thinking you out

so finely, by your clothes, by the dirt

by as if, you could bury the dirt
by a man, circling and circling
your skull
 he has bullets they leave whelps
and I holler, back, I say you I saw...
 the honey at tips of the wheat,
gobs of full sun, deep in her face:

 "And I heard,
"he died, he drowned, "in the river,"
 "Lord! "How I died!"
 they pulled him down, a part of him--
I
 have it, "and once, I saw the skull,
"pleased, "a dog,
 clean by the road it picked
pine combs, mostly sleeps- the storms
are awful here,
towering people figure water bleeding meadow
 and the lightning calls hollow, breaks
the stony sky.



Perspectives

That evening I was sitting on the banks
And concentrating each breath
And, overhead, each sound:
We are old still, perhaps ageless
Compared to our children and, inversely,
Compared to the sounds of still water,
The sounds of dead water
Overhead.

Last night we asked ourselves nonsense:
'What if I had four legs,
Numbered coal to rat-brick and
Forty stairs, frozen and slick,
Where would I start?'
See the marble lap it up:
Recognize what is real and
Define what is image.

My father's father used to come on Saturdays
And fry apples in a hardpan.
We were anxious to eat,
He was restless by nature.
When he went to the river the sky fell deep
And the water ran dark blue.
His eyes faded and we put our hands in our pockets
And waited.
When he died I put my hands in the water and never put rational thought
In perspective again.

Under the Bunker

I revel in the self-indulgence of blowing them
all away without the guilt of return fire.
Restructuring the skin of battle I toss
the old casings to trip them up while I reload.
The suns don't let up on the infrared scopes
-- the bones of oaks are my new cross-hairs --
anything will do. My decoy's visage now marred
by hits that bell-chimed his skull, he is
detectably not me. Held up with only holly
berries as ammo I make them scream and aim
for their tongues. Reasoning the pellets
a forewarning they cut off all decisive
counter-attacks as premature and wave anything
flowing as a sign of surrender. Even when they
are without their guns I will not be drawn in.
I am still a patriot skinned alive and living.

Where do I get off

My legs take me and I from here
where boys in a row shift their weight
and wait their turn, eyes closed,
whisper, whisper inwardly.
Here under the quivering strain,
cement prevents knowledge, light of day
baffled my books, yellowed, stained
by fumbling hands.
Quiet now, the preternatural ear
could not hear
buckles zippers sighs
confusion caused transmission
life exchanged for tears, guttural joy, outside snickers
part of the price.
And tomorrow's despair may again bring them here
pushing eroded sand dune self
for anonymous, automatic pleasure.

Sacrifice

There is something about driving through the woods at night with the windows down that is almost sugar-sweet. Sugar-sweet means cool, but by saying sugar-sweet it means you're on a different level of coolness. It means you know you're truly cool, because if you weren't everyone would laugh at you for saying it: "sugar-sweet," like "golly-gee" or "jimminy creepers." It's like using words from the '60's or '70's. You have to be really cool to say them or you will come off sounding corny like all the Brady Bunch kids. You can't say "far-out" the way Marsha Brady says it and expect to receive respect.

Tonight it's just me, Mike, and Jonathan. We're in Mike's car, and due to that fact we're listening to his music, which is the Stones, always the Stones. I'm more into Zeppelin, but I can dig the Stones, too. I know about Zeppelin from Hammer of the Gods, but I don't know much about the Stones except Mike's nuts about them and this song is playing, and I have to admit this one I can dig indeed:

I was born in a cross-fire hurricane
And I howled at my ma in the driving rain
But it's all right now
In fact it's a gas!
Yes, it's all right . . .
Jumpin' Jack Flash, it's a gas!

The same thing's true with me and my mom, who are at each other's throats all the time about some bullshit or the next, even about going out on a school night like this for a drive when she knows I'll be back eventually. My mom and I live alone together which means she can lay guilt trips on me all day and night, and it will usually work. Except tonight we had a fight over who should clean up the dishes—like I said, bullshit—and I ended up walking out with the last thing she said being, "You better be back by midnight," and the last thing I said being, "Maybe." So tonight it's all right. I feel no guilt.

So we're driving and at some point Jonathan asks, "Where we headed, chaps?" and

Mike doesn't say anything, and neither do I. Jonathan's an exchange student from England and almost as much of an asshole as Mike can be. At first everyone felt sorry for him that they sent him all the way over the ocean with the promise of something sensational, only to land him in a shithole like Bingham. The guy was nice for a while as everyone oohed and aahed over him. But, as with most people, time passes and you get to see their true colors. Tonight, like a typical European bastard he ends up lighting a cigarette. He knows I'm trying to give up that shit, but luckily I'm next to the window where the fresh air is coming in, balmy and fresh, the sounds of the crickets and the Stones and Mike's engine very strong, the glow of Mike's headlights on the woods around, and it's all too too sugar-sweet to mess up with thoughts of mom or words to Jonathan.

Mike takes another gravel road that dead-ends and parks the car. The crickets are especially loud here. We all get out and I grab the bundle from the trunk. We enter the woods flashlightless, Mike in the lead and able to feel the narrow dirt path through the holes in his tennis shoes. His father could buy him a whole damn shoe store, but Mike wears these old ones anyway. Behind him is Jonathan, whose t-shirt sleeves poke from under his vest like an angel's wings, glowing in the dark in front of me. Every once in a while he flicks the ashes off his cig, where they land on pine needles in the path.

As I walk, I pay greatest attention to the bundle swaddled in my arms. Through its cloth I can distinguish the items Mike has thrown together: the ribs of seven knife handles, the container of lighter fluid, a magic marker, and a tennis ball. Most of the things are Mike's, but the tennis ball is his father's. It is a brand new ball, one that glows factory fresh. Mike's father will miss it, and Mike knows that. His parents divorced a couple years ago and his father remarried a lady who, if you meet her, makes you look at even the best looking girls at school the next day and say, "Whatever." Her name is Lee Ann and once in a while we'll be driving along and I'll try to kid Mike about me getting with her, me and Lee Ann riding into the sunset. He doesn't

get upset, because he's thinking he'd like to do the same thing. He doesn't consider her his mom, and barely considers his dad his dad. His father is loaded, the kind who not only has personalized license plates for each of his cars, but writes his name on everything else he owns—even his tennis balls, which he throws into a big drum in their basement after an absurdly small number of hits. He rubs out the "Penn" or "Wilson" and substitutes "Hollingsworth" in deep, well-formed letters. This past summer Mike and I hoarded all the used balls that his father had thrown away, loaded them in a wheelbarrow, and spent a slow afternoon circumnavigating the neighborhood, taking turns hitting them into neighbors' backyard pools. In the evening came a flood of calls for Mike's father, all wanting to know: "What the hell, Hollingsworth?"

Mike does these sorts of things all the time, but I don't like to help him usually. Maybe it's because of the time I met Mr. Hollingsworth for the first time. It was about a year ago, in the kitchen of his father's nice new house. Mike left the room for something and we were talking, and the thing I remember was him telling me to follow my dreams, no matter what anyone else said I had to follow them. Yeah, whatever, I thought. No bullshit, he said, looking at me seriously. For example, instead of a big-wig lawyer, he said, he could have been an artist, maybe had his own studio but maybe not, maybe just living on a street corner doing drawings in chalk on the sidewalk. Just doing what he liked to do. But then, he said with a laugh, if he had chose to be an artist he certainly wouldn't have all this, now would he? He gestured with an arm at his house which is all nice wood and glass with white and silver etching. I suppose not, I said. But I held off thinking of him as a real prick because when he gestured with "All this," it was like it really was not all that much. Even Lee Ann doesn't drive him crazy, it's obvious, and so I try to tell Mike, "Shit, man, you're the only thing he really cares about." But Mike just answers: "It's because he doesn't own me," and a person just has to be cool and shut up, because there is no persuading a person who has his mind made up on hate.

My own father died before I turned two. He died in Vietnam, which I've studied on my own quite a bit. I know the names of the battles and the different operations. My father died during a surprise attack by the Viet Cong. The army gave my mother a lot more information about it, but at some point she lost the letters, or just forgot. She doesn't like to talk about it anyway, and so all I have is bits and pieces. It pisses me off that she can't remember something as important as how her husband died, but it's impossible to argue with her about it. No one likes to talk about things so close to home. She says just the fact he died is bad enough, it doesn't really matter "how." "How" doesn't matter because she knew him. But me, I was just two at the time, so all I have to go on is the details, you know, the details that I can't get at. There's a newspaper story that has the bare minimum, but they don't talk about him like he's a person, don't give him thoughts or feelings. What was he thinking about the day he died? The minute he died? Don't get me wrong, I'm not psycho about it or anything. It's just that I'd like to know. Sometimes I pretend I'm my father walking through the jungle, anticipating the enemy, wondering what I'm going to do if they jump out. Walking along now, I feel like taking the ball out of the bundle and carrying it in front of me, as a fifth level wizard might use a glowing crystal. Instead I feel the ball through the thin cloth, cup it firmly, pretend it's a girl's left tit. Though believe me, I know the difference.

Eventually we arrive at our destination, a house that is no longer a house, a shallow platform that supports twenty-three twenty-foot-high columns that remained when everything else they were supporting burned down. Maybe a Union general burned it down. That's what some people say anyway. Another story is that the place was haunted by its first owners who lost their land, and then they burned the house down when other people moved in. You hear all kinds of stories. If you ask me, some accident happened, and maybe someone rushed in at the last moment in hopes of saving everyone but that person died, too, some kid who was just walking along and saw the flames and said: "Far-out! I'll be a hero!" Sure, every kid wants to be a hero.

When we get to the spot, Jonathan immediately sits down on what used to be the front porch steps, as if this was just a Com-Pak or a library or something. I like to walk around the place, even though I've been here a million times. The columns are a sham, tall turrets of brick covered in molasses and wood and painted in a way to make the whole thing look like real marble. Now mostly what is left is the brick and some of the covering which you can peel away with your fingers and figure you are ruining some archeologist's day by doing it. But the columns still stand at the full height, still bulging a little in the middle, and (in the dark especially) the ruin is capable of appearing truly ancient and sacred, something just as likely to be set in Rome, Italy, as Bingham. The difference is of course that everyone knows about Rome, but God knows what happened here to make this place burn down. So what the hell, it's a temple—our fucking temple—and no one can say different. Neither me or Mike is in a hurry, and no one, not even Jonathan, can make us rush. The rest of the world disappears. We listen to the crickets and clear our minds for what we are about to do.

There is nothing too complicated about sacrificing a tennis ball. Using a bit of chalk I usually draw a pentagram the best I can over the bricks and invading weeds, over what used to be the family's porch. Then one of us (me or Mike—probably Mike) after drawing the appropriate symbols on the ball's skin, sits down with the ball in the center of the figure and—aiming a knife's point in the murky dark—carefully, yet decisively, forces the knife through the ball's axis, driving it through the taut rubbery flesh till the steel hits brick. If it is not done right the ball will kick out. But when it works, six more knives go in next to the first one. Then someone douses the ball with lighter fluid, soaking it well. Finally, after the appropriate words are spoken, we set it on fire. Pure sugar-sweetness.

But before any of this can get started Mike, chronically blind to ritual, lights a match for himself and stares at it. I say something, but he doesn't respond, and I don't bother to repeat myself. People see Mike as a straight-laced guy in school. They see him hanging out with Danny Fox and think "My, my. What a

good kid." But—and this is no exaggeration—Mike is one fucked-up little hombre. He even scares me sometimes, the way he talks about people, as if he's about to go out and kill them, torturing them first. Not really, but it all hearkens back to his father, and if you know that, you can understand. Sometimes though, he'll be talking about his dad in a bad way and I'll say, "Look here, why don't you shut the fuck up! At least you have a dad," which I can't help but feel sometimes. Hell, it's self-righteous, and I didn't even know him, but still, people gripe too much. They need to be brought down to reality once in a while.

This sacrifice begins like the others. I unfold the bundle and arrange the items on the white cloth, noticing the way the moonlight reflects off everything. The night is warm and breezy. As we go through the steps I notice as if for the first time Jonathan sitting with his back against one of the columns and smoking another cigarette that he has somehow managed to light without me noticing. I can't help feeling annoyed. Not just because he's smoking, but because this is his first time at a sacrifice with us, and he's obviously not taking it seriously. As Mike chants, building his voice and reciting the appropriate lines, Jonathan appears indifferent, like he's being made to watch a movie he has already seen.

Then Mike lights the sacrifice, and I stop thinking about Jonathan. The fire travels from the spot on the floor where the liquid was lit and quickly grips the ball, wrapping it with its thin fingers—blue, orange, and yellow. I watch it from where I stand. You have to understand, all guys are pyromaniacs. Maybe some girls are, too, but I don't know. The thing is, fire is one of those things you can look at which wants to be looked at. It's strange. You look into it and feel like it's burning for you and no one else, and the bigger it is or the more into it you get the more powerful you feel, just looking at it. It's mesmerizing in a way. For me it's just something fun, something to do, but for some kids fire is the only friend they've got. Those are the dangerous kids.

At first the ball is indistinguishable from the small pool of flame where it sits. But in no

time the fire on the brick burns out, disappears, leaving only the lighted sphere. It appears propped in place by the knives that impale its back, but soon even the knives fade out of the picture. It's better this way, I think, to watch the ball become completely itself. It has turned into something self-fueling, a spring of fire, a small sun lying on the universe's huge dark plane. Looking down at it, I think how cool it would be to have a dozen little suns I could keep in shoeboxes stacked in my closet. Then an afternoon would come along when, supremely bored, I can take one of the boxes down and—finding the sun inside still burning—just cover the box again and put it back with the others.

A slight wind blows, moving the flames like grass. It makes the lit ball appear delicate for an instant, and I get the urge to run and pick it up. I even take a step, but something dark and glassy flies out of the darkness and stops me as the flame grows suddenly higher. I look at Mike—his eyes glazed and mechanical, his lips slightly apart—who is squirting the lighter fluid can. He is oblivious. For him the flaming ball is a shaman in the middle of a prophecy: a tiny wizened head, no face or eyes, flames crawling like wrinkles, foretelling evil with a hissing smoke-breath that Mike breathes in and interprets for himself. Unlike me, Mike can't forget the knives. He sees them as a headdress for his prophet. Steel feathers.

Soon the flame dies down, and Mike fades into the gloom. I settle into a squat, narrowing my eyes on the burning tennis ball. It seems larger from this perspective. I attempt to capture the same feeling as Mike, to see the sphere as an instrument of war, a napalm bomb. But I cannot picture it moving, nor can I hear screams coming from the woods in the manner I always imagined the scene to happen: the mad dash of troops, the burning chaos. I wish—wish very much—to witness destruction in all its glory, but from the woods around the temple comes only the overwhelming sound of crickets. The best I am able to do is imagine, nearby among the trees, my father in his tent, writing a letter to me and my mother. The light outlines him sitting at a desk with his back towards me, his head and shoulders

predominant. This is how he always appears in memory: as a shadow, faceless, yet real. He is a phantom able to resist the light. I take a step closer and sit down. My father, a hulking sergeant, smokes cigarettes as he slowly moves the pen, causing tiny ash burns in the letter when he isn't careful. He is thinking about me and my mother both. The union of her and me strikes me at first as surprising, but I can handle it here, not here—for once it seems okay, and peering into the flame I begin to feel warmth. At ease. I begin to lie down. As I get closer and closer to the ground the ball seems to grow larger and more buoyant, until I am on my side looking slightly up at it, my cheek resting on a brick, and for a long time the feeling descends around me that says this is the way things are and the way everything has always been. I can watch the tennis ball without blinking and listen to my heart, and I can feel the breeze blowing my hair and the fire.

But right when I'm in the middle of the feeling Mike rushes into view, and with his foot, sends the ball skirting into the woods. He unzips himself and sends a stream on top of it, and you can hear the thing sizzle for a second before it begins to smolder.

For a while, I try not say or do anything. I roll over on my back and close my eyes, where, in the darkness of my mind, the ball still exists, as a pure and solid glowing circle. I watch it bob and duck, float sideways, up, then down again. It wants somehow to escape my mind—to bounce, high, once and for all, to heaven. I want it to.

But it doesn't. It never does.

Then we are walking back and Jonathan offers me a smoke, and I take it without thinking. I take a few drags, but the smoke doesn't do anything for me either. It's a sad truth: sometimes you just get to the point when even the things you used to like make you sick. Sick and bitter.

This housekeeper, this wife, this mother, this woman

I have seen what being a woman
did to my grandmother;
raised on the patient fortitude
of eighteenth century heroines,
she tells me she stopped dreaming
at the age of nineteen.
She used to tell me
things would get clearer with age
but I am two years older than she was
when she understood something
that made her give up her painting
for a trousseau, armchairs, a set of China plates;
something, anyway, that had nothing to do with love,
as she tells me the only reason
I am his granddaughter
is because he was the boyfriend with the nicest ear.

I cannot say why she had a daughter --
I can only think she was tricked into it.
I do not know what lies of feminine defects
or natural callings she took to heart,
but I think she went a little crazy
when she found herself charged
with this child she did not live,
this thing whose colors and textures and themes
were not what she had envisioned,
something that asked for more attention
than her persians or husband,
and so she sent it away to schools
that promised to teach it just how to sit,
the correct way to hold a fork,
how to be quiet or silly at the right moments.

Last week the neighbors
found her sitting on the third stair
of the house she had painted purple,
clutching a can of Lesur peas
and her old fancy dress jewels.
She had expected Orion, she said,
but something was wrong with the sky;
it had eaten her favorite constellation
and she was alone.

Her daughter grew up frightened,
forced herself into every compensating
cranny of other she could find,
even at fifty, rabidly signing up for classes
at the community center.

aerobics, yoga, wok, euchre, quilting,
and then recreating herself on Saturday mornings
as my Sisyphus mother and her bottle of 409,
endlessly polishing
and porcelain islands in her kitchen
and her trophy for the 1989 state award
of local industry for token woman executive.

She tells me I frighten her
the way I wave my black highlighter
at her notions of femininity,
sexuality, marriage, maternity.
She tells me these things will make me happy,
though she often cries and cannot say why.
I think she suspects that
the swallows she keeps captive
with sugar-water and bread-crumbs
to decorate her neatly sculpted yard
are planning an escape,
so I stand on my head and practice the piano
to draw her attention away from them;
secretly I hope they will take me along.

I often dream that I think I am jogging,
somewhere that is not here,
and that people follow me,
thinking I am running from something
they cannot see. When they stop me
I laugh and laugh and laugh
at the misunderstanding until I realize
I am in heels and a blue suit with brass buttons
and carrying a coloring book of reasons to never stop.

This is always followed by the dream
that I am the baby my mother wishes
she could go back and start over with:
I am in the yellow crib
with the tall thick bars,
and my mother's favorite cat
hides in the corner, waiting for her to leave.
Sometimes I think I see her wink to him.
not content to lick the excess milk
from my lips and chin,
he spreads his mouth over mine,
and I, wriggling under thighs
strong from chasing, climbing, crouching,
smell the small, dead animals from the yard
on his breath and have premonitions that when he is done
he will go to my mother's room
to sleep on the edge of her bed and keep her feet warm.



This poem has been sent to you for good luck

This is no joke. This poem
was written by a twenty-
seven year old woman, the day
after she left her husband and small brick house for
a caravan of no-creed Emersonian women determined to
find havoc and make it their lapdog. The luck

has now been sent to you. You will receive good luck
within six days of receiving this poem.
Constance S. received this poem in 1972.
She made twenty
copies and sent them out. Less than four
weeks later, she signed a contract with Doubleday

for a book she titled *What is sad about Tuesdays*.
Send this poem to people you think need good luck.
This poem has great power to do good, but for
your sake, Do not keep this poem.
It must leave your hands within twenty-
four hours. If you are not superstitious, listen to

this: J.R. Mackey, described by his neighbors as too
cynical and often unpleasant on holidays,
received this poem in 1920.
Not believing in luck,
he threw this poem
away. Nine days later, crossing twenty-fourth

street, he was hit by a four-
hundred pound hailstone and died. He was buried next to
his wife, who also ignored this poem,
in New Jersey. It was a cloudy day.
His epitaph was unmemorable. More bad luck.
Furthermore, his only grandchild, at the age of twenty,

left her East-coast college taking only \$20,
The Mysteries of Udolpho in four
volumes, and a stuffed cow she called Lucky.
When interviewed by *Rolling Stone*, she claimed to
wander honeycombed with restlessness during the day,
and, at night, to dream the lines of this poem.

"Luck can be trained," she used to say, but the last
anyone heard, she was headed for Dayton,
copying this poem by hand, twenty times.

Expecting

She would hollow howl
“my face is in my heart
there’s no one there”
And on days when it rained underwater,
little flowers on the surface
rippling,
we believed her.
Days when the liquid seethed to the doorstep
and the barn was an ark
reeling in loneliness
over a slate blue isolation.
A deceptive meadow
his children playing,
somewhere beneath the tangle,
children drowning
wrapped in kelp and the locks of mermaids
half reluctant to lose
as life thundered out
and the salt block gushed in
bursting their hearts, lungs and lives
while eyes bulging perceived paradise
and earth and no partition.
Green leagues under,
the sun still flickers
black shapes flit,
fish fly,
lords of wet and turning pain,
walled endings and split divinity.
Dive down, birth bubbles,
does it rip your insides out?
Twelve pounds of she
breaches the surface and gasps.

*. . . and then I
remembered that
thing Kurt said to
me that night and I
stopped worrying so . . .*

Just tent the evening over the boughs,
and walk me out there,
in there
in deep by miles,
and darker,
I'll still tell you
everything's cool
until

down crack.

Bottle me in black walls of mush and stone,
why don't you,
then break me a leg down in.
This done,
everything's far from cool;
getting pretty damn cold as a matter of fact,

now that you've made of these
jeans, this thin
t-shirt
night - clothes.

In this expanse of trees
I have found the one anti-tree,
I have un-climbed it,
and now find myself immobile, and
under-dressed in will
for such weather.

This pain, this cold,
they are passive pains,
and ones I'll abide.

Do I eat dirt? Do I suck out snails?
Do I fingernail and elbow-hold myself,
with my useless drag,
up and out?
You know my arms were never strong.

Some defy when their world collapses
into a deep hole,
and in the end,
I suppose,

they win or lose.
 But don't think I wish me up just because I am now down.
 I . . . see . . . a due submission.
Perhaps I wish I had never fallen in in here,
perhaps I wish I had dived.



The Little Dog and the Ridiculous Kid

Mandy's mother walked through the front door to the foot of the dark and narrow staircase and called up. Mandy appeared at the top of the stairs, her long brown hair hung straight down the sides of her cheeks. Certain strands were stuck to her lips and forehead and salty cheeks, but that is only if you were close. Her was not and, again, the stairwell was dark and Mandy's hair was long and concealing.

"Mandy, do you know that your dog is dead?"

"He was your dog too."

The mother paused and tried to get more definition out of her daughter's face, but it was dark, and the hair. She turned and went into the kitchen on the right. She called Mandy to come help her unload the groceries and Mandy complied in silence. The mother turned to look at her daughter but Mandy's back was to her as she slowly shelved the canned goods.

"After you finish that, you should go clean up the dog before your father gets home."

"I fed him every day, you should clean him up. Let daddy clean him up--it's man's best friend out there on the driveway and daddy's the only man here."

"But neither I or your father killed the dog, Mandy. Hurry, before it gets dark and other animals come out of the woods to nibble and peck at the poor thing."

"He can't be poor, he's dead. Plus, there's not much left of him, he's mostly just bones and some fur."

The mother turned around with a stern look of enforcement, as did Mandy with her swollen face and red eyes. Mandy's mother turned around quickly and continued chopping the carrots.

"Just do it, Mandy. Your father will be very displeased if he can't park under the garage. It looks like it might rain, and his wax job."

"You know, if it rains on the dog and we leave him out there..."

The mother's finger was bleeding onto the carrots, but she was unaware. "The shovel is in the back storage room, and...and just put him in the can. The garbage man comes

tomorrow morning anyway."

"Mommy, that's unsanitary, and we don't want to leave the dog for just anyone to have. Maybe we should wax him and daddy would put him under the garage. He should get a proper burial."

"Fine, then bury the son-of-a-bitch! Just get him off of the driveway and don't discuss this anymore." The mother did not curse often and she was flush with embarrassment and frustration.

"That's funny, Mommy, because he is...you know? Can we have a funeral?"

"None of this is funny, Mandy--none of this. Get out of here."

"I'm sorry, Mommy, you're bleeding on the salad."

The mother looked at her finger and snatched it up close to her chest, above her heart, as these things are done. There was much blood now. The father walked through a door, a flourish of gray, briefcase swinging, and looked directly at Mandy.

"Mandy, why did you kill your dog?"

"It's your dog too."

"When are you going to to be responsible for your own things, kid. You don't just leave an animal tied up all day in one-hundred degree weather with no water. That's nuts. It'll be a cold day in hell before you get anything again. Responsibility, Mandy, that's important." The father then caught sight of his wife's finger, or, more to the point, his wife's blood. "Honey your finger." He nodded towards her sliced finger. He then looked over at Mandy and the dried water stains on her face and all this made him want to leave. "It's just a cut, Mandy, cheer up," then, "You better do something about that dog. Looks like rain and..." The father exited to the right where the living room was with his favorite chair. Mandy looked at her mother who had been looking at her and the girl bowed her head and went outside to shovel the dog.

The dog did not care to be shoveled so he sat up as best he could. "Why did you kill me, Mandy?"

"Because you are a stupid dog and I did not love you."

"But you fed me every day and walked me and played with me when you first got me."

You must have loved me then. Why did you not give me any water? As owner, you had a responsibility which you did not fulfill."

"So?" She lifted the dog with great effort and let him fall into the large green trash can. Except she did not get all the way over the can and his body hung on the side, half in, half out.

"Why don't you bury me you evil child? You told your mother I should be buried."

"I don't feel like it, plus I don't want to think about you anymore."

"But you did love me, you told me."

"Maybe." She sent the dog's head over the edge with a swift belting of the shovel and placed the lid on the can.

Mandy ran back to the house and, once inside the door, looked left, then right. Her mother was at the sink, her father was smoking a cigarette.

"I did not kill the dog."

Her mother was at the sink, her father was smoking a cigarette.

Louder, she said, "Hello, my name is Mandy, and I did not kill the dog."

The father turned his head slowly, cigarette between his fingers, and stared, through the smoke, across the living room, into the foyer, at his daughter.

"Wash up."

The mother watched from the sink and, when her eyes met those of her daughter, turned quickly back to her finger. Mandy ran up the dark and narrow staircase.

How the dog got into the bathroom, no one was sure. He lay in the tub, limbs all askew craning his unnaturally stiff neck to look up at Mandy.

"So you didn't kill me?"

"That's right."

"Bullshit."

"Don't talk like that, I'm only twelve."

"Do you know that you are a ridiculous kid?"

"Shut up. You're ridiculous."

"When someone calls you a kid, that means you are a small goat. You are a small goat."

"You're dead." Mandy turned the hot water on all the way, plugged the drain and went down to dinner.

There was no salad so they just ate the chicken and it was dry.

The father said, "I'm gonna miss the dog."

Mandy said, "I'm not, he was stupid."

The mother, relieved, said, "So why were you so upset this afternoon?"

"I wasn't."

"Go get your bath."

Mandy played with the solitary piece of chicken on her plate until it dropped to her lap, staining the front of her shirt with barbecue sauce. It began to rain and the trio watched out the window as the driveway, dot by dot, turned a darker shade of gray.

"Good thing you got the dog up or..." said the father.

"I can't go take my bath, the bathtub is full."

"Full of what?"

"Dog."

The father looked at the mother and the mother looked back at the father. The father and the mother looked at the child.

"Pick up your chicken and don't play with your food or you won't eat in this house. You can go out and eat with the animals."

"Do we have any bread? I would like to have some bread with my sauce, honey. Mandy, if you don't want to take your bath then go to bed this very instant. No TV for you tonight."

The mother got the bread and Mandy left the table, climbed the stairs, hurried past the closed bathroom door with a guilty sideways glance and locked herself in her room.

That night Mandy was awakened by a rhythmic splashing on her nose. The dog was smiling at Mandy from her ceiling, looking like a cubist collage of dog parts each of which was stuck roughly in the correct region, but with little attention paid to accurate positioning.

"What are you doing up there, you ugly dog? You stink."

"I've come to say good-bye."

"Good. Leave"

"But not until I give a proper farewell to the little girl who killed me."

"What are you going to do? You better not hurt me--my daddy..." She was trembling just a little and pulled her covers up to her chin.



"Your daddy what? Your daddy liked me more than he ever liked you. Do you have any idea how angry he is that you let me die? Especially like that--it was downright demonic."

Mandy began to cry, and in a weak squeal she pleaded with the soggy beagle, "Please, please, please don't! I didn't mean to kill you, I promise. Just go away."

"And just where am I supposed to go? This was my home. You were utterly responsible for my existence and you failed miserably rendering me bones and fur. Now I have nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to eat, drink."

"Go away." With this, the cubist dog left the ceiling with the most vile of sucking noises and fell on Mandy, then bounced over with a flip to the floor where he slowly morphed into his normal, living, dry, properly assembled, incognizant, not-so-talkative dog-self. Mandy stared in wonder and fear from beneath her sheets as the dog, wagging its little rear, quietly left the room. Mandy pulled her covers back, slipped on her bathrobe and slippers and followed the dog through the dark house to the bottom of the stairs. The dog exited through his little doggy door and trotted across the street to the woods. Here he skipped and frolicked and twisted and tumbled. Mandy ran after him, giggling with delight at the sight of her dog playing like dogs should. She rubbed his belly and kissed his face. They ran in circles as the dog nipped Mandy's heels, her hands in the air, her fingers wriggling in a frenzy. The dog jumped up on her legs and licked at her face. Mandy grabbed his two front paws and began to dance around the empty forest with the smiling dog, all the while giggling and squealing uncontrollably, forgetting that her dog should, by all sensible accounts, be in a large green Rubbermaid trash-can at the end of her driveway, dead.

Without warning, the small dog squirmed out of Mandy's grip, turned and ran as fast as it could into the darkness of the forest. Mandy stopped and listened for a while to his little feet on the forest floor and then took off after him. She tripped on a large branch and fell face-first in a thick brown mush. When she stood up she could no longer hear the dog.

The light of morning was creeping all

around her as Mandy walked up her driveway toward the front door of her parents' house. Looked like it might rain. Her face and bathrobe were caked with mud. She opened the door, walked into the foyer with the large hanging light fixture, looked left, then right. Her mother was at the sink, her father was smoking a cigarette.

"The dog is not dead, he just ran away," she said, out of breath and slammed the door.

Her mother was at the sink, her father was smoking a cigarette.

"Get ready for school or you'll miss your bus again," said her father, without twitching anything more than the end of his cigarette. "Someday, kid, you'll learn what responsibility is all about. One day you're not going to be so lucky as to have someone around to take you to school when you miss your bus. It's time for you to learn these things. You're not a kid anymore. Responsibility--it's what making it in this world is all about."

Losing Father for a Day

In your absence I sneak into the cool morning
of your room. The light linen drapes insulate
the freshness of your dreams, effervescing in the close air
like bubbles bursting against me.
Your pillow, smelling richly of you, cradles your head
as if it were still there.

I recall a lucid day on the beach when
your feet printed on the sand their rough impression
of the sum of your movement--its weight, measure, and speed.
My game to cross the swamp of my imagination by
walking in those steps ended in your hug--the other side, strong, sure,
within reach like so many things about you then.

Waking from my dream, I open my eyes and feel the heat of meridian,
the cool morning burned off by realization
that this day may take you and leave you with only
the things that smell and look of you, but do not
hold you, who today are ephemeral.
Sweating in the room suddenly airless,
I know that one day you will become imperceptible.

Suffering from . . .

Grandpa fumbling
with the organic connection,
his muted trombone an extension
of a romantic self.
Now he protests with a grimace
“my lip is gone”
His wife responds
to an inner dialogue,
snapped into the kitchen
by her husband’s plaint.
“oh he’s a sickie” she assures us
and chuckles, a kleenex to her mouth.
She’s tears and smiles
and beyond hope.
The stumbling strains
of “Ain’t She Sweet”
tickle a brain-deep scar
a brain-dead memory
and she claps her hands
and mumbles along,
a language of noise
that sounds the same.
she fooled us for years



Visit to Roanoke Island

I. The Cittie

Sitting in front of a fountain
in bright sunlight, I say
we are falling apart.
The sun splits light into prisms;
colored houses, birds made out of
lavender and green Murano glass
hurt my eyes. Soon
you will leave for the island -

I say help me remember.
The land I stand on is eroding,
my one dune
being pulled at and pulled at.
Even the sand blows like pale smoke
towards the water -
something is about to happen to us.
Something is slipping away.
You say don't be hysterical.

There are walled gardens all around us,
wild, private
who knows how big, paths
walked over and over by ladies
in arranged marriages, gravel ground
into wilted flowers.
They are presided over by
double porches facing inwards,
and statues of cherubs and winged dogs
with salt on their lips.
I cannot tell you why this makes me
want to hurl myself into the waves.
(It can't be that cold.)

In the park damaged old men
feed orange-eyed birds, gulls like pale flies.
You watch as I bread and
their small picking claws hold my hands.
I did not mean to give them all of it.
I do not feel the sting until after
the fury of beaks and claws, the wings
beating my blunt and stubborn feet.
All afternoon I stare at my hands, saying
look at the pink lines they have made!
How little I must have eaten,
how little breathed if this
gives me idiot joy.

I wonder what they have built for me
as I gather the colors, the brightness
to wear as a ring around my finger.
When I squint my eyes,
everything turns blue.
I will come to you.

II. The Outer Banks

When we make our escape (the window
blowing open in an empty room)
you take me
to a settlement lost to sickness.
Now they can't even find the bones, just water
that turns yellow as it breaks behind
plum colored grass, sand like a great wet skin,
the mottled inside of an egg.

The colors are all wrong except
for the broken shells - lavender, orange,
bone white. A broken conch
sticks out of the sand like a rose.

This is the bloom to end our winter
and bring spring. We drag the chill
behind us like a shadow
as we add our own salt
to the sand. There is no shelter,
only a rough red lighthouse peeling,
only the horrible stone monument
on Kill Devil Hill. This is your land.
I love it unwillingly.
In the flooded city, the houses are
raised on toothpicks.
We talk with the lights out so we can
watch the rising waves.

You thrive without people and buildings.
I shake against the wind
and a line of black birds
shimmer in the white sky like
asphalt under the sun.
But there is no sun -
their wings make the illusion of light
as they pulse. We shiver
and you roar at the waves.

III. After

Those returning found a post with
no Maltese cross signing distress, just
one word, a name
of an island never visited.
They must have slid into the mud.
They must have buried their own.
We mingle upon them,
close to our element,
refusing to seek a new season.
You smile, and say
if our bones are found,
they will be bleached white, brazen
as the first settlers.
I say
you are wilder than gardens
turning in and in on themselves;
I am braver than birds.
You are the last rough landscape.
You are my lost colony.

Emotion is breathing

My father
on his back
in bed
on Sunday morning
lifts me in two hands
grips ribs
I, a sea bird diving
a chicken too heavy
to fly and falling
through a framed map
we laugh, the hair on his chest
undulates and I curious
Indian ear to earth
a Lone Ranger riding hard
hear his heart popping
and wish it would never stop,
but afraid. In that way,
I can't listen to my own rhythm
but often flustered insomniac
I hear a liquid scratching
on my pillow case
and it's me inside me alone.
Mom has breasts
and ear to chest
is out of the question,
but later come lovers
who are not mother
who cross arms
like dead Egyptians
and communicate
through silence.

Waking Up South of Eden

I. The Way It Was

Cain kills Abel,
And the body lies still in the brush.
The blood on the forehead will wash away
With the next rain. Cain drops the blunt cudgel,
Also bloody, and as the ground drinks
Deep, he murmurs to the weighted gray sky
What might be the first punchline,
“There’s your blood sacrifice,”
In half as many syllables.

Murder announces itself with a loud bonk.

In time, the ground will digest the heavy stick as well.

Cain smiles, the childish notion of victory
Is appealing. If the only offense comes to
His dead brother, with whom he was angered
Anyway, “Why, this seems to be a pretty good way
Of getting what I want.”

Cain kills Abel.
Of the children of Eden, only the conqueror survives,
And all are his descendants, always eager
To march,
To raid,
To wage great greedy campaigns, reassured that
They have nothing to lose but their own lusty
And undervalued lives.

Nothing to destroy but the crude things they built.

[Here insert Thomas Eliot’s *The Waste-Land*]

This must be the end, they thought. “Love
Among the Ash-heaps” or some-such
Was all we had left. Fragments and wastage were
Confused with absolute destruction, and absolutely feared.

II. Her Rebuttle, August 6 1945

“You think I’ll always be here--

“I’ll tell you what--

“You listen to me and good

“There are consequences starting yesterday--

"And what? What can *You* do to me?
"I don't believe in your *consequences*."

"You dumb jerk. Another stunt like that and,
"Well, you can just go out and find yourself
"Someplace else to sleep. To live."

And with one more wrong remark
From Cheating Husband on the matter,
Angered Wife lets fly a porcelain platter, which finds its mark,

It's the last straw he says,
And leaves. It's like when
That plate left her hand everything became glass
And crashed down to drown their yapping.

No, no crashing, no sound for all the noise,
No substance for all the fragments
It all melted, glass slowly down around them
In agonizing split seconds, settling over the scene

Cold and infertile. Dead and betrayed.

III. The problem of Raising Cain Again

"Attendant nations," I said smartly, "we've all become."
"We've started our scenes or two, but no president or premiere
Or whatever they are is going to test what every one
Is mutually sure of."

"Glass." She said, yawning. "They say it
Turns the ground to glass." She did not hold me any more
Tightly as she opened her mouth and words again came out.
"Some things are so big you cannot even fear them."

fragments?

Josh May



[\$LOCALE]

[\$DATE DD MM, YY]³

PICTURE LESSON

This is the first story, and it's about the back of a milk carton. But it's going to take a minute.

It began, innocently enough, beginnings imbued with innocence as they are even in stories. Had still a sense for those you know, knew enough to know. They've got to receive you wide, come at you palms out open armed.

Taught himself this, walked himself through lessons. Things were not cluttered to him. His things were not complicated, not enough. Letters — well. There were problems, printing. He could have gone into detail for you how the nine pin this and the font cartridge that. This was years ago by the way, Easy Stories beginning then as they do initial arms, the thing for words page one to stick to the short ones, one at a time after the other. So the lesson: *Are you tired? Oh no, I'm not even speely at all yet.* Years ago when he was as we all are adorable, up all night squinting though he said he hadn't been, gummy eyes red at the breakfast table and even though sleep was an Issue she bought him one Brand New for his fifteenth birthday with a second disk drive if he promised to pick up everything off of the floor, which he did, what books

³ Field codes, the first line of which is optional, depending upon its importance to set the scene. E.g. *scene: Miami. Bottle TN bourbon.* E.g. *scene: a road. Tree.* E.g. *Australia*

the sweltering penal colony, south of the conventional (i.e. arbitrary) line of demarcation which you Will, Kind Reader, when you see it piano-wired across the page (as above) kindly (as is your Nature) equate in your Mind's eye (a fallacy permitted for the Time Being in the interest of Convenience) with barbed wire. [*The Ability to Imagine that a Line on a Page is Really Barbed Wire*, ©1955, The Ayow'd'sowers (i.e. Assoc. of Individuals Among Whom Disbelief Is Suspended Willingly.)]

29 February 1992

Inclusion of a date is mandatory, but it need not be *the* date. For a Brief Moment (literally this time a fraction of the second hand swath) he entertained the idea of attaching to each letter a photo titled Him With Newspaper diligently proffered.

HE

Then, at least, they could have the assurance that it really was when you said it was.

HE

But then what *can't* be faked?

HE

You could have it notarized.

HE

Right, I'll notarize it. (*HE pilfers Texas Seal from mother's office.*)

HE very quickly gives up pretension. This being the real first story, the first real difficulty. One should know when one is being lied to. Fields, codes, lies.

were left at least, and a new desk, a wide folding table, simple, wide. Cinder blocks. Then a board. He learned that the one thing you can never have is too much work space. What he learned was, that everything has its place. This is years later. On the desktop.

Which began to crawl up the wall. Can you understand that? Not literally. Let's skip back a few frames. You remember the desk, started off small, got cluttered, then books and sheafs drifting up the sides, bigger desk alongside the first, bricks, boards until there was only space in the room to step in, just inside the door

it's locked all the time, now, and the phone —

he has a machine, doesn't he?

We're almost to the milk carton.⁴

That is to say, things have a way of getting ahead of themselves, in stories too. That is, he is no exception.

The door. You could get just inside (which isn't the point, nor the deadbolt) until the room was cut off at the waist. And there was a mattress, at least, in the corner somewhere under this tabletop — well it was sort of like a false floor

a barefaced lie

Not about the floor.

Not about the fucking floor.

Sheets, then. There were some wadded sheets in the corner.⁵

A comforter, not — not one that mother pieced together for him, how domestic. But one she bought him, all the same. One, in fact, that they picked out together. They went on a shopping trip together, when he was in grade school. They so much liked to do so. But that's another story altogether.

So he had, at least, perfectly serviceable bedding, which was fine, for him, for when he slept.

Now. So you have a picture, presumably, of the desktop. This is what it means, that it is crawling up the sides of the room. That the walls began the same way. That they started out, some very nice posters. Splashes of color, on — on white walls. Otherwise white. Impressionist paintings. Then they started — the walls, not the posters — later the posters — leafing. That's the only way to describe it.⁶ Well, it is! Notes, blue, little. Stick-um. Special tape — and you could tack things to each other, the tape was just tacky, it didn't peel off newsprint or scar the paint — notes — schedules. There was a picture of — maps, and a newspaper photo of a crowd at a British football match, and a fence. Postcard pictures — letters a few wall collage — this is Years Later — room and other texts —

⁴ Which isn't the point, either. He's losing you, he can feel it, knows. What's behind the signifier that you are? He knows you as his own sweet self.

Play along, this interjection Just for You!Accept No Substitutes™. *Fuck him. He can speak my lines, if they speak to him so much. See here how I can rip this letter up —*

This —

"It is philosophically impossible" he says. Step through this text. Come on, give him a good solid kick in the jaw. Just like Dante! did. To that wrathful sinner, on a page in hell.

⁵ For Christ's sake. You're as good as lost, thrown at a tangent off a curve, taken at c. (*What's that?* Ask Uncle Remus up there in the Interminable Unloading Zone, where the *real* story is relegated to scrunched-up intertextual numerals.)

⁶

...

Enough, then. This is the end of the lesson.⁷ There came a time, as you can very well imagine.

Didn't there used to be walls in here?

Think of them as crucifixes

@ bed heads, Cathodelic, alco-ho,

give me a fix-on

your my posixion!

THE MORAL OF *THIS* STORY IS MISSING IN *THE* STORY

So pay attention!

there was a cutout from a milk carton, the back part. It looked as if it had been cut out from a milk carton, the back part. It had MISSING on it and remained uncovered

What's this? Maybe you need to find yourself, ha!

O thas my All I Have To Go On

lil notes stime for bed



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